

SOVIET LITERATURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

ANATOLY RYBAKOV

# THE DIRK

*A story*



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*Foreign Languages*

PUBLISHING HOUSE

MOSCOW

1954

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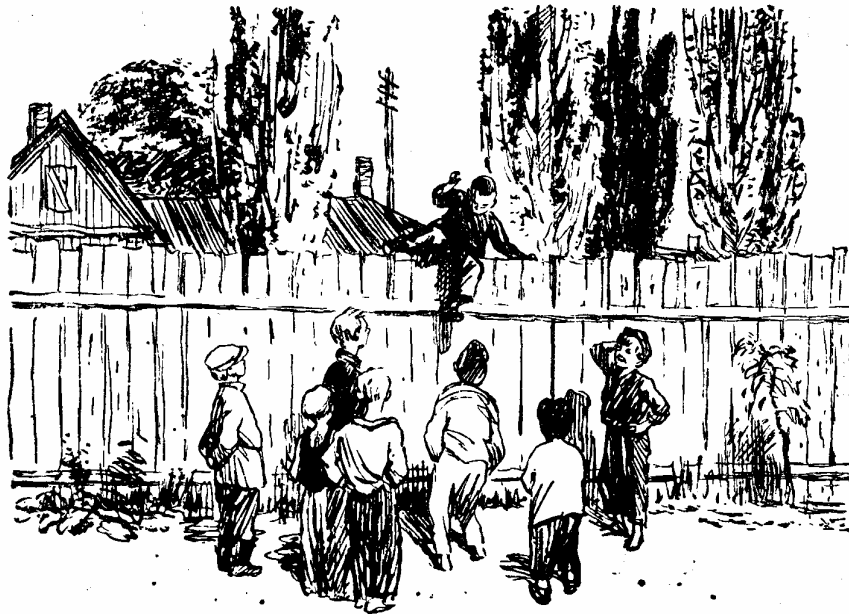
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## Part I

### REVSK

#### Chapter 1

#### THE DAMAGED INNER TUBE

Misha got up noiselessly from his bed, dressed, and slipped out to the porch.

The broad, empty street was dozing in the warmth of the early morning sun. Only the crowing of roosters broke the silence, and from the house came an occasional cough and sleepy mumbling—the first sounds of animation in the cool stillness of repose.

Misha screwed up his eyes and shivered. He felt like going back to his warm bed, but the thought of the catapult red-headed Genka had been parading yesterday made him shake off his sleepiness, and he picked his way carefully across the squeaky floor-boards to the store-room.

A narrow ray of light coming from a tiny window near the ceiling fell on a bicycle against the wall. It was an old machine that had been assembled from spare parts; its tyres were flat, the spokes broken and rusty, and the chain cracked. On the wall over the bicycle hung a torn inner tube with patches of every hue and colour; Misha took it down, cut out two thin strips with his penknife, and replaced it so that the cuts were hidden against the wall.

He cautiously opened the door and was about to leave the storeroom, when he suddenly caught sight of Polevoy in the passage, barefooted, in a

striped jersey and with his hair all ruffled. Misha softly pulled the door back, leaving it slightly ajar, and watched through the narrow opening.

Polevoy went into the yard, stopped in front of a neglected kennel, and looked about him attentively.

"Why isn't he asleep?" Misha wondered. "And he's behaving queerly, too."

Everyone called Polevoy "Comrade Commissar." He was a tall strongly built man with fair hair and sly, laughing eyes. He had once been a sailor, and he always wore wide black trousers and a jacket that smelled of tobacco, and carried a revolver on a belt under the jacket. All the boys envied Misha because Polevoy lived in his house.

"Why isn't he in bed?" Misha thought. "Now I'll never get out of here!"

Polevoy sat on a log near the kennel and looked round the yard again. His searching gaze swept the opening Misha was peeping through and the windows of the house.

Then he slipped his hand under the kennel, rummaged about a long time evidently feeling for something, and finally straightened up, rose to his feet, and went back to the house. The door of his room made a scraping sound, the bed creaked under his heavy weight, and everything became still again.

Misha wanted to start making a catapult right away, but he also wanted to know what Polevoy had looked for under the kennel. He moved up to it stealthily, then stopped to think.

Should he look? What if someone saw him? Misha sat on the log and eyed the windows. No, it was wrong to be so inquisitive ... he scooped out the earth and thrust his hand under the kennel. Of course there was nothing there, Misha told himself. He had simply imagined that Polevoy was looking for something. He rummaged about under the kennel. Nothing, of course! Only earth. He would not take it out and look at it even if something was hidden there; all he wanted was to make sure. His fingers touched something soft like a piece of cloth. So there *was* something there, after all. Should he take it out? Misha looked at the house again, gave the cloth a tug, scraped away the earth, and pulled out a package.

As he opened the package the steel blade of a dagger flashed in the sunlight. A dirk! Naval officers carried dirks like that. It had three sharp edges and no sheath. Coiled round the yellowed bone handle was a small bronze serpent with open jaws and tongue curled upwards.

It was only an ordinary naval dirk. Why was Polevoy hiding it? Strange. Very strange—Misha inspected the dirk again, then wrapped it in the cloth, put it back under the kennel, covered it with earth, and returned to the porch.

The gates of neighbouring yards were thrown open with a clatter and the cows, their tails swishing, lumbered out importantly to join a passing herd. They were followed by a boy who wore a long ragged coat that came down to his bare heels and a sheepskin cap. He was shouting at the cows and deftly cracking a whip that trailed after him in the dust like a snake.

Misha thought of the dirk as he sat on the porch making the catapult. It was an ordinary one, except for the small bronze serpent. But what was Polevoy hiding it for?

He finished the catapult. It was better than Genka's, he was sure, and, to try it, he picked up a stone and let it fly at some sparrows hopping in the street. The stone missed the target. The sparrows flew off and alighted on the neighbouring fence. Misha wanted to try another shot but was stopped by the sound of steps in the house, the grating of the damper, and the splashing of water in the tub. He hid the catapult under his shirt and went into the kitchen.

Grandmother was moving large baskets of cherries that stood on a bench. She was wearing a greasy dressing-gown, the pockets weighed down with keys. Her plump face was careworn and furrowed with wrinkles, and near-sightedness made her blink her small, slightly squinting eyes.

"Take your hands off!" she exclaimed when Misha put his hand into a basket. "The idea... with dirty paws!"

"Stingy!" Misha grumbled.

"You can have some later. Go and wash yourself first."

Misha went to the sink; he wetted his palms under the tap, touched the tip of his nose, slid his hands across the towel, and went to the dining-room.

Grandfather was already there, sitting in his customary seat "at the head of the long table covered with a brown oilcloth with a flowered pattern. He was a grey-haired old man with a thin beard and a reddish moustache, and when Misha came in he was using his thumb to carry a pinch of tobacco to his nostrils and sneezing into a yellow handkerchief. There was laughter in his lively eyes, set in kindly beaming wrinkles, and from his jacket came a mild, pleasant smell, that was exclusively his own.

Breakfast had not yet been served, and to while away the time Misha pushed his plate into the middle of a rose in the pattern of the oilcloth and with his fork traced a ring round it.

A deep scratch appeared on the oilcloth.

"My respects to Mikhail Grigoryevich!" Polevoy's merry voice boomed behind Misha.

Polevoy came out of his room with a towel tied round his waist.

"Good morning, Sergei Ivanovich," Misha replied with a sly look at Polevoy: he would never guess that Misha knew about the dirk!

Misha covered the scratch with his elbows when Grandmother carried the samovar into the room.

"Where's Senya?" Grandfather asked.

"In the store-room," Grandmother replied. "Took it into his head to repair his bicycle at this unearthly hour!"

Misha started at these words and took his elbows off the table, forgetting all about the scratch. Went to repair the bike?! Just his luck! Uncle Senya had not gone near the bicycle all summer and of all days he had to do the repairing to-day. He was bound to see the tube now and make a tiresome fuss.

Uncle Senya certainly was a nuisance! If Misha got into a scrape with Grandmother she would simply give him a scolding and let it go at that. But not Uncle Senya. Not him! His style was to curl his lips and begin a long lecture. Whenever that happened he would look past Misha, fidget with his

pince-nez, endlessly putting it on and taking it off, pull at the gilt buttons on his student uniform. Misha could not see why he still wore that uniform: he had been expelled from the university a long time ago for "stirring up disturbances." It would be interesting to know what disturbances such a well-mannered person as Uncle Senya could stir up. His face was pale and grave, and he wore a short moustache. At dinner he usually squinted over a book and ate his food absent-mindedly.

The clatter of the bicycle in the store-room made Misha start again.

And when Uncle Senya appeared in the doorway with the slashed tube in his hand Misha sprang out of his chair, overturning it as he dashed out of the house.

## Chapter 2

### THE BOYS OF OGORODNAYA AND ALEKSEYEVSKAYA STREETS

He dashed across the garden, scrambled over the fence and landed in the neighbouring street—Ogorodnaya. Only a hundred yards separated this street from his own—the Alekseyevskaya; but the Ogorodnaya boys, sworn enemies of the boys from the Alekseyevskaya, noticed Misha and charged upon him from all sides, gleefully whooping and whistling at the prospect of beating up a boy from the Alekseyevskaya, and a Moscovite to boot.

Misha quickly climbed back on to the fence and straddled his legs over it.

"What, caught me?" he shouted at them. "You miserable Ogorodnaya (*Ogorodnaya*—from the Russian *ogorod*, meaning vegetable garden. —*Tr.*) scarecrows!"

He could not have picked on a deadlier insult. A hail of stones showered down on him. Misha slid off the fence, feeling a lump swelling on his forehead, but the stones continued to fly, landing near the house from which Grandmother made a sudden appearance. She peered near-sightedly and, turning to the house, called to someone. Uncle Senya, most likely. Misha pressed himself against the fence.

"Hey, fellows," he called out, "wait a sec! I want to tell you something."

"What?" demanded a voice from the other side of the fence.

"First stop throwing!" Misha climbed back to the fence, cautiously watching the boys' hands, and said: "Why did you all team up against one fellow? Play fair—one against one."

"Come on then!" cried Petka Petukh ( *Petukh*—from the Russian meaning cock.—*Tr.*), a sturdy boy of about fifteen throwing off his torn jacket and pugnaciously rolling up his sleeves.

"Let's agree that while we're fighting you fellows won't interfere," Misha warned.

"All right, all right, come down!"

Uncle Senya was already standing beside Grandmother on the porch. Misha jumped off the fence and Petukh immediately stepped up to him. He was almost twice Misha's size.



"Hey, what's that?" Misha said, poking at the steel buckle on Petka's belt.

The rules forbade any metal objects on the clothes of the opponents. Petukh took off the belt, and his trousers almost dropped. He caught them with one hand and while he was tying them up with a bit of string someone had given him, Misha pushed the boys to make a wider ring.

"Give us more room!" he was saying; then, seeing a chance of getting away, he shoved one of the boys aside and took to his heels.

The Ogorodnaya boys started off in pursuit, shouting and whistling; Petukh brought up the rear, holding on to his trousers and almost crying with disappointment.

Misha ran as fast as his legs could carry him, his bare heels flashing in the sun. Behind him he heard the patter of his pursuers' feet, their heavy breathing and cries. He made a sharp turn, dashed down a short alley, and reached his own street. The Alekseyevskaya boys came running to his rescue, but the others turned back without going into battle.

"Where've you come from?" red-haired Genka asked.

Misha drew a sharp breath and looked round at his friends.

"Ogorodnaya Street," he said nonchalantly. "Fought fair and square with Petukh, and when I was getting the better of it, they all jumped on me."

"You fought Petukh?" Genka asked dubiously.

"Who else? You? A tough chap he is; look at the bump he gave me!" Misha said, touching his forehead.

His friends gazed on this blue mark of his valour with great respect.

"I gave him something to remember me by, too," Misha continued. "And I took away his catapult."

He pulled a catapult with long red rubber bands out of his shirt.

"Better'n yours by a long shot!"

He hid the catapult and gave a contemptuous look at the girls making mud-pies.

"Well, and what are you doing?" he jeered at Genka. "Playing hide-and-seek, catchers? 'Who's afraid of the big bad wolf, big bad wolf, big bad wolf—'"

"What d'you take me for!" Genka exclaimed with a shake of his red forelock, but for some reason he flushed and said quickly "Let's play knives."

"For five hot ones with grease."

"Right."

They sat on the wooden pavement and began throwing a penknife into the ground in turns: a plain throw, from the palm, a long throw, over the shoulder, a straight throw....

Misha finished the ten throws first and Genka stretched his hand out to him. Then Misha made a fierce face and raised two spit-wetted fingers. The few seconds that these preliminaries took seemed eternal to Genka, but Misha did not hit him.

"The grease's dried up," he said, lowering his hand.

He started wetting his fingers all over again. This was repeated before every blow, until Misha finally paid off all the five hot ones. Genka tried to

hold back the tears welling up in his eyes as he blew on his smarting hand; it had turned blue.

The sun was rising higher and higher in the sky; the shortening shadows pressed closer to the fences; the street lay hushed, hardly breathing in the torpid heat; and the air was stifling. The boys decided to go swimming and trooped off to the River Desna.

The narrow road, grooved by hardened ruts, wound across the fields that spread out in all directions in greenish-yellow squares. These seemed to sink into hollows and clamber the hills, gradually becoming round and moving off into the distance in a broad arc that supported the woods, the isolated barns, and the pensive clouds.

The wheat stood tall and still. The boys tore off the ears and chewed the grain, energetically spitting out the husks that stuck to their palates. There was a rustling in the wheat and frightened birds flew up into the air almost from under their feet.

At the river's edge the boys chose a sandy spot, undressed, and jumped into the water, splashing it up in huge fountains. They swam, dived, wrestled, jumped from a rickety bridge, and finally climbed back to the bank and dug themselves into the hot sand.

"Misha, is there a river in Moscow?" Genka asked.

"Yes. The Moscow River. I've already told you that a thousand times."

"You mean it flows through the city?"

"Yes."

"Then how can you swim in it?"

"In trunks. They won't let you near a mile of it without trunks. The mounted militia watches."

Genka smirked in disbelief.

"What are you smirking for?" Misha said getting angry. "You haven't seen anything except your Revsk, and you think you're smart!"

He fell silent, watching a drove of horses approach the river. "Now you tell me: what's the smallest horse?" he asked. "A foal," Genka replied without hesitation.

"There, you don't know! The pony's the smallest horse. There are Shetland ponies, they're the size of dogs; while Japanese ponies are like cats almost."

"You're fibbing!"

"Who, me? If you'd been to a circus just once you wouldn't argue. You haven't been to a circus, have you? Own up: you haven't?... There you are. And you're arguing!"

Genka stopped to think for a moment.

"A horse like that's no good," he said, "can't use it in the cavalry, or anywhere else."

"What's the cavalry got to do with it? D'you think people fight only on horseback? If you want to know, one sailor's worth three cavalrymen."

"I'm not saying anything about sailors," Genka said, "but you can't do without cavalry. Nikitsky's gang is all mounted."

"Well, what about it!" Misha said with a contemptuous curl of his lip. "Polevoy'll catch that Nikitsky soon anyway."

"That's not so simple," Genka contended, "they've been trying to get him a whole year now, and they can't."

"They will," Misha said confidently.

"Easy to say," Genka looked up, "but he's wrecking trains every day. Father's already afraid of driving his engine."

"Never mind, they'll catch him."

Misha yawned, dug deeper into the sand and shut his eyes. Genka was also dozing. They did not feel like arguing any longer in the heat. The silent steppe was lazily withdrawing into the horizon as though to escape the scorching sun.

### Chapter 3

#### AFFAIRS AND DREAMS

Genka went home to dinner, but Misha went to the crowded, noisy Ukrainian market.

He wandered about the market for a long time, looking at the carts piled high with green cucumbers, red tomatoes, and wicker-baskets of berries; the pink, shrilly squealing sucking-pigs; the white geese flapping their great wings; the sluggish oxen endlessly chewing the cud, their sticky saliva dribbling to the ground.

As he walked through the market Misha remembered the Moscow bread and the watery milk bartered for potato peel. He longed for Moscow, its tram-cars, and evening lights.

He stopped before an invalid rolling three beads on a bench. Each was of a different colour—red, white, and black. The man covered one of them with a thimble and offered a prize to anyone guessing its colour. But the right colour was elusive.

"Friends!" the invalid said, appealing to the losers. "If I start losing to everyone I'll have to sell my last leg. You've got to under stand that."

While Misha was examining the beads, someone suddenly put a hand on his shoulder. Turning round he saw Grandmother standing behind him.

"Where on earth have you been the whole day?" she asked sternly, clinging tenaciously to Misha's shoulder.

"Swimming," Misha mumbled.

"Swimming!" Grandmother repeated. "How do you like that? He was swimming—well, we'll speak about it at home."

She gave him her basket of purchases and marched him off.

Grandmother walked in silence. She smelled of onions, garlic and of something fried, something boiled, like all the smells in the kitchen.

"What'll they do to me?" Misha thought as he walked beside Grandmother. He was in a bit of a jam, he could see that. Against him there were Grandmother and Uncle Senya. For him—Grandfather and Polevoy. But what if Polevoy was not at home? That would leave only Grandfather.

And what if Grandfather was sleeping? That would leave no one to stand up for him, and give Grand mother and Uncle Senya a free hand. They would take it in turn lecture him. Uncle Senya would lecture and Grandmother would rest, and then Grandmother would take over and Uncle Senya would rest.

There was hardly anything they would leave unsaid! They would call him bad-mannered, say he would never amount to anything; that he was a disgrace to the family; that he was a trial to his mother and that if he had not yet driven her to her grave he would do so in the next few days (he felt sure they would say that, even though Mother was living in Moscow and he had not seen her for two months); that it was amazing how the earth held him at all—and many other things like that....

When they came home Misha put the basket in the kitchen and went to the dining-room. Grandfather was sitting near the window listening to Uncle Senya discussing the political situation, as he reclined on the sofa and smoked a cigarette. They did not even so much as glance at Misha when he entered. That was on purpose! To make Misha feel small, to show that looking at him was a waste of time. That was Uncle Senya's way of torturing people. As far as Misha was concerned he could do as he liked, it was even better that way, because by the time Uncle Senya was ready to deliver his lecture Plevoy would come home. Misha sat on a chair and listened to their conversation.

A few words were enough to tell him that Uncle Senya was raising a panic again. Bandit Makhno had occupied a number of towns, he said, and Antonov, another bandit, had approached the outskirts of Tambov. Fancy getting panicky over that! Last year, when the White Poles had occupied Kiev and Wrangel had broken through into the Donbas, Uncle Senya had also started to panic. Well, what had happened then? The Red Army had crushed the lot. Before that there had been Denikin, Kolchak, Yudenich (Whiteguard generals who led the counter-revolution in the U.S.S.R. during the Civil War.—*Ed.*), and other Whiteguard generals. The Red Army had smashed them all. And it would lick these, too. .

From Makhno and Antonov, Uncle Senya turned to Nikitsky.

"You can't call him a bandit," Uncle Senya said, unbuttoning the collar of his student jacket. "Moreover, they say he's a man of culture, a former naval officer."

What? Nikitsky not a bandit? Misha almost choked with indignation. Why, Nikitsky was burning down villages and killing Communists, member of the Komsomol, (All-Union Lenin Young Communist League.—*Tr.*) and workers! What was bandit then? It was disgusting to listen to Uncle Senya's prattle.

Plevoy finally came. Misha sighed with relief. Now his punishment would be put off till to-morrow, at the earliest.

Plevoy took off his jacket and washed. Then everyone sat down to supper. His laughter filled the room. He called Grandfather—father and Grandmother—mother; he winked playfully at Misha and addressed him as Mikhail Grigoryevich. After supper they went out of the house and sat on

the porch steps.

The evening brought a fresh coolness into the garden; some girls were singing in the distance and snatches of their songs reached the porch; the dogs barked incessantly in the vegetable gardens.

Polevoy pulled at a pipe of home-grown tobacco and spoke of voyages to distant lands, of mutinies on the high seas, of cruisers and submarines, of Ivan Poddubny and other famous wrestlers in black red, and green masks, of strong men lifting three horses together with the carts, each cart containing ten persons.

Misha gaped in wonder. Orange lights blinked timidly from the dark rows of little wooden houses huddling close on the silent street Polevoy also spoke of the *Empress Maria* on which he had served during the world war.



The *Empress Maria* was a huge ship, the most powerful battleship in the Black Sea Fleet. She was launched in June 1915 and blew up near Sevastopol in October 1916, half a mile off the coast.

"A black business that was," Polevoy said. "She was not struck by a mine or a torpedo, but blew up on her own. The magazine of the first turret, that had about forty-eight tons of powder in it, was the first to explode. That set everything off. In an hour the ship was already under water; the survivors, less than half the crew, were all either badly burned or injured."

"Who blew her up, then?" Misha asked.

Polevoy shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Many people tried to get to the bottom of it," he said, "but all to no purpose; and then came the Revolution. You have to ask the tsarist admirals for an explanation."

"Sergei Ivanovich," Misha asked suddenly, "who's greater, a tsar or a king?"

"Hm! . . ." Polevoi spat out the brown tobacco juice. "One's as good as the other."

"And are there still tsars in other countries?"

"Yes, here and there."

"Should I ask him about the dirk?" Misha thought. "No, better not. He might think I had followed him on purpose."

A little later everyone went back into the house. Grandmother made her usual evening rounds, closing the shutters. The iron bolts clanged warningly. The kerosene lamp hanging in the dining-room was put out, and the moths and midges that had swarmed around it melted into the darkness.

Misha lay awake in bed a long time.

The moon sent its pale threads through the chinks in the shutters, and a cricket began chirping behind the stove in the kitchen.

They had no crickets in Moscow. What would a cricket be doing in a big, noisy apartment, where people walked in and out at night, banging the doors and clicking the electric switches! That was why he heard a cricket only in Grandfather's quiet house when he lay alone with his dreams in the dark room.

What a splendid thing it would be if Polevoy gave him the dirk. He would not be unarmed as now. And the times were alarming, with the Civil War going on. Bandits were running loose in the Ukrainian villages, and even the towns were not safe. Detachments of the local self-defence corps patrolled the streets at night, armed with old rifles with rusty bolts and no bullets.

Misha dreamed of the future when he would be tall and strong, when he would wear bell-bottomed trousers, or, better still, puttees; smart khaki army puttees.

He would carry a rifle, hand-grenades, machine-gun belts, and wear a revolver on a creaky leather waist-belt.

He would ride a raven-black horse, slender-legged, sharp-eyed, with a powerful croup, short neck, and a sleek coat.

And he would catch Nikitsky and break up his gang. Then he and Polevoy would go to the front and fight shoulder-to-shoulder; he would save Polevoy's life heroically and die, leaving his friend to grieve for him all his life; and he would never again meet a boy like Misha....

And Misha went to sleep.

## Chapter 4

### THE PUNISHMENT

Misha did not doubt that Uncle Senya had invented this punishment. It could not have been anyone else. And the thing that hurt most was that Grandfather was siding with him.

"Got all the running about you wanted yesterday?" he said,, looking up at Misha while they were having their breakfast. "Well, I'm glad of that. Should last you for a week, at least. I'm afraid you'll have to stay indoors to-day."

Waste the whole day at home! To-day. On Sunday! The fellows were going to the woods and might even cross to the island in a boat, while he ...

Misha twisted his mouth and stared at his plate.

"What are you sulking about?" Grandmother said. "You're getting far too mischievous."

"That's enough," interjected Grandfather, rising from the table. "He's got his punishment. Now it's all over."

Misha slouched despondently from room to room. What a rotten place this is! he thought.

The walls in the dining-room were covered with oil paintings. The paint was cracked and had lost its lustre. One painting showed a huge white seagull skimming over blue waves; another was of a reindeer with long, branching horns, standing between two straight pines; a third painting had some herons in it; yet another depicted bearded hunters in top boots and feathers in their caps, with guns and bandoliers slung over their shoulders; in the foreground were dogs with noses close to the ground. Misha thought the dogs had clever eyes.

Portraits of Grandfather and Grandmother, taken when they were young, hung on the wall behind the sofa. Grandfather had a thick moustache, and his clean-shaven chin was propped up by a starched collar with bent corners. Grandmother wore a high-necked black dress and a medallion on a long chain around her neck. Her hair was piled high on her head so that it almost touched the frame.

Misha went out into the yard where two wood-cutters were sawing fire-wood. The saw rang merrily while a carpet of yellow sawdust was rapidly covering the ground round the saw-horse.

Misha sat on the log near the kennel and studied the wood-cutters. The older man looked about forty; he was of medium height, stocky, had a swarthy face and his curly hair stuck to his perspiring forehead. The second man was a young, fair-haired fellow with a freckled face and bleached brows, and somehow he looked slack and clumsy.

Misha stealthily slipped his hand under the kennel and felt for the package. Should he take it out? He looked at the wood-cutters out of the corner of his eye. They had stopped sawing and were resting on the fire-wood. The older man rolled a scrap of paper into a small bent cone, filled it with tobacco from his palm, and lit it. While he smoked, the second man dozed.

"Whew! I'm sleepy!" he said, opening his eyes and yawning.

"When you're sleepy even a harrow's a good bed," the older man replied.

The men fell silent. All was quiet in the yard. Only the hens pecked a rapid tattoo on a wooden trough. They were drinking water, comically throwing back their small red-combed heads after every gulp.

When the wood-cutters rose and began splitting the fire-wood again, Misha carefully pulled out the package and opened it. He turned the blade in his hand and noticed a hardly perceptible engraving of a wolf on one side. On the second side was a scorpion, on the third a lily.

Wolf, scorpion, and lily. What could they signify?

Misha's thoughts were rudely disturbed by a log falling near him. He pressed the dirk to his breast in alarm, covering it with his hand.

"Move off, kiddy, or you'll get hurt," the swarthy man said.

"I'm not a kid," Misha retorted.

"Oho! You've got a sharp tongue!" the man laughed. "Who are you? The commissar's son?"

"What commissar?"

"Polevoy," the man said and for some reason threw a look at the house.

"No. He only lives with us."

"Is he at home?" the man asked, dropping the axe and looking intently at Misha.

"No. He usually comes in at dinner-time. Do you want him?"

"No. Thought I'd ask, that's all."

When they had split all the wood, Grandmother brought the woodcutters a plate of pork, bread, and some vodka. The man with the fair hair drank his vodka silently, but the older man made a ceremony of it.

"Well, here's how!" he said, and emptied his glass.

He wrinkled his face, sniffed at the bread, and cleared his throat noisily.

"Ah, that was good!" he said with a wink at Misha.

They ate the meal slowly: sliced the pork into neat pieces, chewed and sucked the skin. Before going off each drank a ladle of water.

Grandmother, however, remained in the yard. She stood *a* large brass pan with a long wooden handle on a tripod, heaped kindlings under it, and made a wind-break of bricks. That meant she was going to cook jam and stay there for some time. Misha saw it was no use trying to return the dirk to its hiding place, so he put it in his sleeve and went into the house.

"Don't make a noise. Grandfather's sleeping," Grandmother said grumpily when Misha passed her.

"I'll go quietly," he answered.

He hid the dirk in his room under the bed, intending to put it back where he had found it as soon as Grandmother left the yard. At the worst, he thought, he could take it back in the evening under cover of darkness.

It was so still in the house that Misha could hear the clock ticking on the wall and a fly buzzing against a window-pane. Time hung heavily on his hands.

He stopped at Uncle Senya's room and put his ear to the door. Uncle Senya was coughing and rustling some papers.

"Uncle Senya, why do sailors carry dirks?" Misha asked as he walked in.

Uncle Senya was lying on a disarranged narrow bed and reading a book. He looked at Misha over his pince-nez.

"What sailors? What dirks?" he said with a puzzled expression.

"Don't you know? Only sailors carry dirks. And I want to know why they do." Misha sat on a chair firmly resolved not to get up until dinner.

"I don't know," Uncle Senya replied impatiently. "Part of their uniform, I suppose. Is that all?"

That meant Misha had to leave the room right away. "Let me stay here a little. I'll be very quiet," he pleaded. "Only don't disturb me," Uncle Senya said, taking up his book again.

Misha sat with his hands under his thighs. Uncle Senya's small room



contained a bed, a bookcase, and a writing-desk with a pistol-shaped inkpot on it. To open the inkpot you had to press the trigger. Misha wished it was his; all the boys at school would envy him then.

Pictures and portraits covered the walls. One of them was a portrait of Nekrasov Shura Bolshoi always recited from Nekrasov at school parties. " 'Who Can Be Happy and Free in Russia,' by Nekrasov," he would announce before every recital as though everyone did not know the poem had been written by Nekrasov.

The painting by Repin that hung next to Nekrasov's portrait had the words "They did not expect him." It showed a political prisoner returning home unexpectedly from exile and taking the whole family by surprise. The eyes of his daughter, who had probably forgotten him, expressed surprise and wonder, as she turned her head towards him. Misha thought of his own father who would never return. He had died in a tsarist hard-labour camp, and Misha did not remember him.

Uncle Senya had an astounding number of books; he kept them in the bookcase, on top of it, under the bed, on the table.... But he never gave Misha anything to read; as if Misha did not know how to handle books. Why, in Moscow he had a library of his own; the *World of Adventure* magazine was worth practically everything Uncle Senya had!

Uncle Senya went on reading without paying the slightest attention to Misha. When he left the room Uncle did not even look up.

What a bore! He wished dinner-time would come round faster or that the jam would be ready. Grandmother would be sure to let him have what she had skimmed off.... Misha went to the window. A huge green fly with grey wings was crawling up and down the window-pane, and every time it went down it filled the room with a loud buzzing as it beat its wings and body against the glass. At last here was something he could do! He could train his will-power a little by looking at the fly and forcing himself not to catch it.

Misha watched it. What a noise its buzzing made! If he let it go on it might awaken Grandfather. The buzzing had to be stopped, Misha decided, but to do so he had to catch the fly. No, he would not kill it; but would let it out into the street.

There was nothing easier than catching a fly. In a trice it was in his fist. He opened his hand carefully and drew the fly out by one of its wings. It beat its free wing frantically in an effort to escape, but Misha held it firmly.

He opened the window and stopped short. It would be a pity to let it go, he thought. Just wasting the time he'd spent catching it. And when you came to think of it, flies were disease-carriers. While hesitating whether to let it out or to kill it, he suddenly felt someone watching him. He looked up and saw Genka standing under the window.

"Hello, Misha!" he smirked.

"Hello," Misha replied guardedly.

"Caught many flies to-day?"

"As many as I need."

"Why aren't you coming out?"

"Don't want to."

"You're lying: you're not allowed to, that's why."  
"Fat lot *you* know! I'll come out if I want to."  
"Well, start wanting!"  
"But I don't."  
"You don't!" Genka laughed. "Better say you can't."  
"I can't?"  
"You can't!"  
"If that's what you think!" Misha climbed on the sill and jumped out into the street next to Genka.  
"What d'you say to this?"  
But Grandmother put her head out of the window before Genka could reply.  
"Misha, come home at once!" she called. "Run!" Misha whispered.  
They sped down the street, darted into a side alley, climbed over the fence into Genka's garden, and hid in a tree hut.

## Chapter 5

### THE TREE HUT

Genka's hut was made of boards, branches, and leaves and it stood about ten feet from the ground balanced between three trees that hid it with their foliage. From it there was a view of the entire town, the railway station, the River Desna, and the road leading to the village of Nosovka. It was cool in the hut, it smelt of pine, and the leaves quivered slightly in the dying rays of the July sun.

"How will you go home now?" Genka asked. "You'll get it from your Grandmother, you know."

"I shan't go home at all," Misha announced.

"What d'you mean?"

"I shan't go, that's all. Why should I? To-morrow Polevoy is going to take his detachment out against Nikitsky's gang, and he'll take me with him. The job's got to be done."

"What'll you do in the detachment? Be drummer to a retired goat?" Genka burst out laughing.

"You can laugh as much as you like," Misha replied imperturbably. "Polevoy's taking me as scout. In a war all scouts are boys. Polevoy also told me to choose some other fellows, but—" he looked regretfully at Genka, "we haven't got the right fellows." Misha sighed. "Looks as though I'll have to go alone."

Genka looked appealingly into Misha's eyes.

"Well, all right," Misha breathed condescendingly, "bring me something to eat and we'll think it over. Only mind you don't say *a* word to anyone, it's a big secret."

"Hooray!" Genka shouted. "We're going to be scouts!"

"There you go!" Misha said angrily, "You're already yelling and giving the secret away! I shan't take you."

"All right, all right!" Genka said lowering his voice to a whisper; he slid down the tree and disappeared into the garden.

While he waited for Genka, Misha stretched himself out on the plank floor and rested his chin on his fists. This was a fix! He could not sleep in the street, but he was ashamed of returning home, especially of facing Grandfather. Then he remembered about the dirk—someone might find it, and that would be a pretty kettle of fish!

Misha looked at the garden through the foliage. It was planted with low apple-trees, luxuriant pears, raspberry-canes and gooseberry bushes. Why, he asked himself, did different fruit grow on different trees when they all grew on the same ground next to each other?

A lady-bird settled on Misha's hand; it was small, round, had a hard red body and a black pin-point head. Misha picked it up carefully, put it on his palm and chanted: "Lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home; your house is on fire, your children alone"—and it unfolded its tiny wings and flew away.

A wasp droned into the hut, circled round Misha's head and, falling silent, sat on his leg. Would it sting him? Not if he kept still, Misha thought, and lay motionless. It crawled along his leg, then took off with a monotonous hum.

A vast but unnoticed living world was teaming all around him. An ant dragged a pine needle, throwing on the ground a small angular shadow that moved with it. A little grasshopper leaped in the grass, its long legs bent so sharply they seemed to be broken in the middle. A sparrow hopped in the garden path, its awkward sideways movements watched by the dreamy, half-closed but attentive eyes of a cat dozing on the steps of the summer-house. The breeze carried into the hut the smell of the grass and the scent of flowers. A tender drowsiness fell upon Misha and he closed his eyes and forgot his troubles. . . .

Genka breathlessly clambered into the hut with a big warm piece of under-done beef under his shirt.

"Here, look," he whispered, "took it out of the soup."

"You're mad!" Misha cried in horror. "Don't you realize you've left everyone without their dinner?"

"What of it!" Genka exclaimed, throwing his head back recklessly. "I'm going away as a scout, aren't I? They can cook another piece of beef for all I care." He chuckled, well pleased with himself.

Misha ate the meat, tearing it with his teeth and hands. What a blockhead Genka was, after all! He was sure to get a belting from his stern father, a tall, thin man with a grey moustache, who was an engine-driver. And his step-mother would also have something to say about it.

"Heard the news?" Genka asked.

"What news?"

"Catch me telling you!"

"That's your business. Only I can't imagine you as a scout. Will you keep things from me then, too?"

The threat in Misha's voice had its effect. Now, after the theft of the meat from the pot, Genka had only one recourse—to be a scout. That meant he had to obey.

"We had a man from Nosovka to see us just now," Genka said, "and he told us Nikitsky's gang's quite near."

"What about it?" Misha asked, fiercely chewing the meat.

"Don't you see? They may attack Revsk."

"And you believed it?" Misha said with a laugh. "You poor sap. And you want to be a scout!"

"Why shouldn't I?" Genka stammered.

"Nikitsky's near Chernigov, that's why. He can't attack us because we have a garrison. See? A gar-ri-son...."

"What's a garrison?"

"You don't know what a garrison is? It's... well, how shall I put it. . it's—"

"Wait a minute! Hear that?" Genka whispered suddenly. Misha stopped chewing and listened. Shots rang out somewhere beyond the houses and the reports were drowned in the blue dome of the sky. This was followed by the screeching of the siren at the raid way station and the hurried splutter and rattle of a machine-gun.

The boys looked silently at each other in alarm, then pushed aside the foliage and peeped out of the hut.

Clouds of dust were rising from the road to Nosovka. The sound of firing came from the railway station and, before the boys could collect their wits, yelling horsemen in red-topped lambskin caps their whips whistling in the air, galloped up the deserted street. Whiteguards had broken into the town.

## **Chapter 6**

### **THE RAID**

Misha hid at Genka's and when the firing stopped he looked into the street and ran home, keeping close to the fences. Grandfather was standing on the porch, confused and pale. Lathered horses with Cossack saddles were snorting near the house.

Misha ran up the porch and what he saw in the house froze him to the threshold.

Polevoy was fighting desperately with bandits in the dining-room; six of them hung on to him and though he resisted with all the strength of his powerful body, they pulled him down to the floor where they rolled over and over, knocking over the furniture and dragging with them the table-cloth, door-mats and curtains.

Another Whiteguard, the leader evidently, was standing motionless near the window his eyes riveted on Polevoy's movements.

Misha concealed himself behind numerous coats hanging from the rack. His heart was in his mouth. He waited for Polevoy to get up, as he had so

often seen him in dreams, shake the bandits off with his mighty shoulders, single-handed, and send them all flying.

But Polevoy did not get up. His furious efforts to throw the bandits off grew weaker. Finally, the bandits stood him on his legs, twisted his arms behind his back, and led him to the Whiteguard standing near the window. Polevoy's breath was coming in gasps and blood was oozing through his fair hair. He was barefooted and wearing his striped jersey. Misha realized he had been surprised in his sleep. The bandits were armed with carbines, pistols, and sabres, and their hobnailed boots rang against the floor.

The Whiteguard leader looked at Polevoy with unblinking eyes. A black forelock had escaped from under his cocked fur cap and hung over his piercing grey eyes. A crimson scar ran down his right cheek. The only sounds in the room were the laboured breathing of the men and the indifferent ticking of the clock.

"The dirk!" the Whiteguard snapped in a sharp, hollow voice. "The dirk!" he repeated, his eyes, fixed on Polevoy, almost popping out.

Polevoy said nothing. He took a deep breath and slowly shrugged his shoulders. The Whiteguard stepped up to him, raised his whip, and brought it down heavily across Polevoy's face. Misha shuddered, tightly shutting his eyes.

"You've forgotten Nikitsky? Then I'll remind you!" the Whiteguard raved.

So this was Nikitsky! And Polevoy had concealed the dirk from him!

"Listen here, Polevoy," Nikitsky's voice was unexpectedly calm, "you can't get away. Return the dirk and clear off anywhere please. If you don't my men'll hang you!"

Still Polevoy said nothing.

"All right," Nikitsky said. "Blame yourself!"

He nodded to two of the bandits and they went to Polevoy's Misha recognized them as the wood-cutters he had seen in the mo: They began searching the room, turned everything over, littered the floor, broke the door of the cupboard with the butts of their carbines, ran their knives into the pillows, and raked the ash out of the stove.

Misha was afraid they would now go to his room. He left his shelter and moved stealthily to it.

Night was already setting in. In the darkness Misha's hand closed round the cold steel of the dirk that lay under the bed. He pulled it out and hid it in his sleeve. Holding both the sleeve and the handle in his fist, he returned to his hiding place behind the coats in the passage.



The bandits were still ransacking Polevoy's room, while Polevoy himself stood in the dining-room, his body bent forward, his arms twisted behind his back. Suddenly there was a thud of hoofs from the street and rapid footsteps were heard on the porch. A Whiteguard bandit came in and said something to Nikitsky in a low voice.

Nikitsky made no move.

"To horse!" he cried in the next second, cracking his whip.

The bandits dragged Polevoy into the dark passage that opened on to the street and the back-yard. As they pushed him into the passage, Misha took Polevoy's hand and opened his fist.

The handle of the dirk touched Polevoy's palm. He drew the dirk towards him and, taking several steps forward along the passage, jerked his hand up and stabbed the bandit in front of him in the neck. Meanwhile, Misha threw himself at the other bandit's feet, tripping him up, thus giving Polevoy time to run out into the dark back-yard.



But Misha did not see whether Polevoy had escaped. He was struck down by a terrible blow with the butt of a revolver and he sagged like a sack into the corner under a canvas rain-coat hanging from the rack.

## Chapter 7

### MOTHER

Swathed in bandages, Misha lay quietly in bed listening to distant sounds coming in through the slightly stirring lace curtains.

People were walking in the street. He heard their footsteps on the wooden sidewalk, and their deep-toned voices speaking in Ukrainian....

A cart squeaked by....

A boy rolled a wheel, driving it with a stick.

All these sounds reached Misha through a sort of haze and were jumbled up with his short quickly-forgotten dreams. Polevoy.... The Whiteguards.... The dark night into which Polevoy had vanished... Nikitsky.... The dirk.... The blood on Polevoy's face, on his own face.... Warm, sticky blood....

Grandfather told him what had happened. A detachment of railway workers had surrounded the town and not all the bandits got away on their swift horses. But Nikitsky had escaped. Polevoy had been wounded in the fight and was now in the hospital at the railway station.

"What a hero you are!" Grandfather said with a pat on Misha's head.

But he was not a hero at all! A hero would have shot all the bandits and captured Nikitsky.

Misha wondered what Polevoy would do when they met.

Probably slap him on the back and say, "Well, Mikhail Grigoryevich, how are things?"

Perhaps he would give him a revolver and a belt to hang it on, and they would walk down the street together, armed and bandaged like real soldiers. That would give the fellows something to look at! Even Petukh would not be able to scare him then.

Mother entered the room. Grandfather had sent her a telegram and she had come down from Moscow a few days ago.

She tidied the bed clothes, cleared the plates and bread from the table, and brushed off the crumbs.

"Mother," Misha asked, "is the cinema in our block working?"

"Yes."

"What picture are they showing?"

"I don't remember. Lie still."

"I am. Has our bell been repaired?"

"No. You'll do it when you come home."

"Of course, I will. Who'd you see of the fellows? Did you see Slava?"

"Yes."

"And Shura Bolshoi?"

"Yes, I saw them all. Lie quietly, I tell you!"

What a pity he was going to Moscow without the bandages! How the fellows would have envied him with them! And what if they were not taken off after all and he went to Moscow all bandaged up? Wouldn't that be grand! And he would not have to wash....

Mother was sitting by the window, sewing something.

"How much longer will I be in bed, Mother?"

"Until you get well."

"But I feel quite well. Let me go out."

"Don't be silly! Lie still and stop talking."

"Grudging me a little walk," Misha thought gloomily. "Wants to keep me here in bed! See if I don't get up and run away."

He imagined to himself how Mother would enter the room and find him already gone. She would weep and pine away with grief; but it would be no good and she would never see him again.

Misha gave Mother a sidelong glance. She was bent over her sewing. Now and then she stopped to bite off the thread.

She would have a hard time without him! She'd be all alone. And no one would be there when she came home from work. The room would be empty and dark, and every evening she would sit thinking of Misha. He felt a lump rising to his throat.

She was so frail and reserved, with her grey, radiant eyes; so tireless and industrious. She came home late from the factory, cooked the dinner, tidied the room, washed Misha's shirts, darned his socks, and helped him with his home-work. Yet whenever she asked him to do something like chopping wood, going to the baker's for bread or warming up the dinner, he always found some excuse for backing out.

Dear, adorable Mummy! How often had he distressed her by disobeying his teachers and misbehaving in school! Mother had been called to school on several occasions and she had pleaded for Might before the headmaster. How many things had he smashed, torn or spoiled! Books, clothes.... All his misdeeds fell on Mother's thin shoulders. But she worked patiently, darned and sewed. And he was ashamed of holding her hand in the street "like a little boy." He never kissed Mother—he thought that was sloppy. And today, too, he had been thinking of some way to distress her, after she had dropped every thing at home, suffered an agonizing week travelling in goods-vans and brought him all the things he needed. She had carried them all herself and now never left his bedside.

Misha half closed his eyes. The room was quite dark. Only the corner where Mother was sitting was illumined by the golden light of the passing day. She was sewing, her head bent over her work, and singing softly.

*Blacker than treachery, blacker than tyranny,  
Black is an autumn night,  
Black as the prisons that loom in the mistiness,*



*Black is the tyrant's might.*

And the word "Hear. . ." that started the refrain was as drawn-out and melancholy as a groan.

This was the song of a young prisoner with fine features, who sang it with his hands clutching the bars of his prison while his eyes gazed on the happy, inaccessible world outside.

Mother sang on and on. Misha opened his eyes; he could just dimly make out her pale face in the darkness. One song followed another and all of them were mournful and sad.

Misha suddenly burst out crying.

"Misha, darling, what's the matter?" Mother asked gently, bending over him.

Without a word, he flung his arms round her neck, pulled her towards him, and pressed his face against her warm, familiar blouse.

"Mummy, darling, I love you so!" he whispered.

## **Chapter 8**

### **VISITORS**

Misha recovered quickly; the only bandage left was on his head. He was allowed to get up for short intervals and to sit up in bed, and, finally, his chum Genka was let in to see him.

Genka came into the room timidly and stopped near the door. Misha did not turn his head.

"Sit down," he said weakly and watched Genka out of the corner of his eye.

His friend sat down gingerly on the edge of a chair, stared open-mouthed at Misha, and vainly tried to hide his rather dirty feet under the chair.

Misha lay on his back with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Every line on his face expressed pain and suffering. From time to time he touched the bandage on his head—not because his head ached but to make Genka give it its proper due.

"How d'you feel?" Genka asked, finally plucking up his courage.

"All right," came the faint response, but the deep sigh that followed was meant to show that he really felt ill and was heroically enduring racking pain.

"You're going to Moscow?" Genka asked after a pause.

"Uh-huh," Misha replied with another sigh.

"They say you're going in Polevoy's troop train."

"How d'you know?" Misha sat up immediately. "Who told you? "



"Someone."

Silence. Misha looked up at Genka.

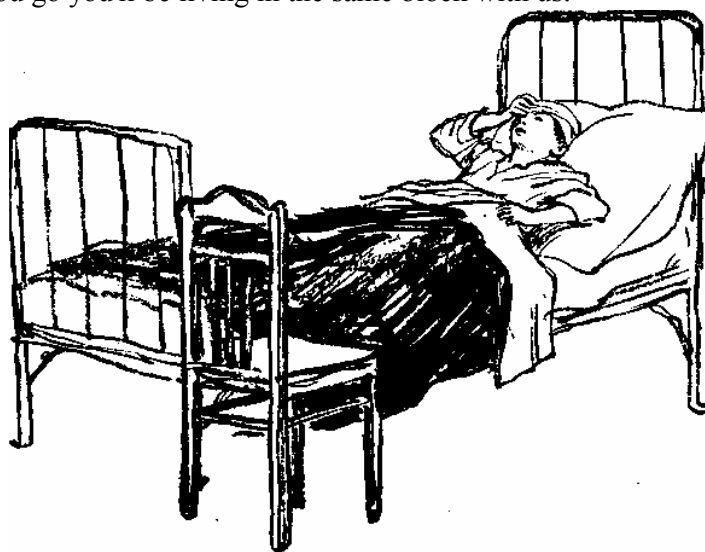
"And what've *you* decided to do?"

"About what?"

"About going to Moscow."

"Why d'you ask these things?" Genka said, shaking his head angrily. "You know quite well that Father won't let me go."

"But your aunt, Agrippina Tikhonovna, has often asked you come. And in the letter Mother brought from her she says she wants you to come now. If you go you'll be living in the same block with us. "



"I'm telling you Father won't let me," Genka sighed. "Mother won't either."

"But Aunt Nyura's not your real mother."

"She's good to me just the same."

"Agrippina Tikhonovna's better."

"Oh, how can I go?"

"That's easily done: in the box under the carriage. You can hide there and as soon as we pull out of Revsk you can come out and join us."

"What if Father drives the engine?"

"You'll get out at Bakhmach then, when they change the engine."

"What'll I do in Moscow?"

"Why, anything you like! You can go to school or you can get a job in a factory."

"How d'you mean—a job in a factory? I don't know how to do a job."

"You mean you don't know what to do in a factory? Rubbish. You'll learn. Just think it over. I'm serious about it."

"You were also serious about the scouts, and I can still feel where I was whacked for that meat."

"Can I be blamed if Nikitsky attacked Revsk? If that hadn't happened we'd have certainly gone as scouts. As soon as we arrive in Moscow we'll volunteer to fight the Whites. Will you go?"

"Where?" Genka asked guardedly.

"First to Moscow, then to the front to fight the Whites."

"If we're going to fight the Whites, then perhaps I might," Genka replied evasively.

When Genka left, Misha lay back in his bed and thought of Polevoy. Why didn't he come? What was the secret of the dirk? There must be a purpose for the wolf, scorpion, and lily on the blade, and the bronze serpent round the handle. What did it all mean?

His thoughts were interrupted by Uncle Senya. He came in, and took off his pince-nez. Without it his eyes were small and red and seemed to have a frightened look.

"How are you feeling, Mikhail?" he asked, fixing on his pince-nez.

"All right. I'm allowed to get up already."

"No, no, please don't get up," Uncle Senya said anxiously when Misha tried to get up. He stood awkwardly for a while, started pacing the room, then stopped in front of the bed again.

"Mikhail, I want to have a talk with you," he said.

"Not about the tube?" Misha wondered.

"I hope you're old enough—hm—so to say—to understand me and to arrive at useful conclusions from what I have to tell you."

"Here it comes!"

"Well," continued Uncle Senya, "I cannot see a prank in the unfortunate incident we had recently. I see it as a premature start in politics."

"What? What did you say?" Misha asked with a surprised stare at Uncle Senya.

"You don't understand me? I'll explain. You were a witness of an act of political struggle, and you, a young person, as yet immature, interfered in this act. And to no purpose."

"What d'you mean?" Misha asked in amazement. "The bandits were going to kill Polevoy and you wanted me to do nothing about it? Is that what you mean?"

"As a person of high morals, you must», of course, champion any sufferer, but only in the event, say, of Polevoy being attacked by robbers in the street. But nothing of the sort happened in the case I'm alluding to. The Reds are fighting the Whites and you're still too small to meddle in politics. Your business is to keep out of it."

"Why should I keep out?" Misha said, touched to the quick. "I'm for the Reds, you know."

"I'm not agitating either for the Reds or for the Whites. But I consider it my duty, as a relative, to warn you against participating in politics."

"Then according to you we should let the bourgeoisie rule?" Misha stretched out on his back and pulled the blanket up to his chin. "No! Just as you like, Uncle Senya, but I don't agree with you."

"No one's asking you whether you agree or not," Uncle Senya said irritably, "you listen to what your elders tell you!"

"That's exactly what I'm doing. Polevoy's my elder. My Father was, too. And Lenin. All of them are against the bourgeoisie. And I'm against them, too."

"You're impossible!" Uncle Senya exclaimed, making a deprecatory gesture with his hand as he stamped out of the room.

## Chapter 9

### THE BATTLESHIP *EMPRESS MARIA*

Uneasiness grew in Revsk and Mother hurried with the preparations for their departure.

Misha was already up, but as yet Mother would not let him out of the house, only allowing him to sit by the window and watch his friends playing in the street.

Everyone treated him with respect. Even Petka Petukh from Ogorodnaya Street came to see him and gave him a cane ornamented with spirals, rhombs, and squares, and before he left, he said:

"Misha, you can walk in our street as much as you please. Don't be afraid, we won't touch you."

But Polevoy still did not come. Misha thought of the grand times he used to have sitting with him on the porch and listening to amazing stories about seas, oceans, and the vast moving world. He wondered if he should go down to the hospital himself. The doctor there would be sure to let him in if he asked him.

But Misha did not have to go to the hospital. Polevoy came himself and Misha's heart beat excitedly when he caught the sound of his merry voice far down the street. Polevoy came into the house in army uniform and top boots, and brought into Misha's room the sunny freshness of the street and the scents of the warm summer. The chair near Misha's bed creaked plaintively and swayed under Polevoy's weight, withstanding it all the same, and the man and boy looked at each other and smiled.

Then Polevoy patted the blanket and narrowed his eyes slyly.

"Hello, Mikhail Grigoryevich! How are you getting on? All right?"

Misha only smiled happily.

"Will you be up soon?" Polevoy asked.

"Mother's letting me go out of doors to-morrow." "I'm glad to hear that." After a moment's silence Polevoy burst out laughing. "Neat the way you tripped up the other one. Capital! Well done! And got me out of a heap of trouble, too. I'm in your debt, my lad, and I'll settle it when I return from the front."

"From the front?" Misha's voice trembled. "Uncle Seryozha... only don't be angry with me.... Take me along. Please, please."

"I think we could arrange it," Polevoy said, knitting his brows as though considering Misha's request. "I'll tell you what we'll do. You'll go in my troop train as far as Bakhmach, and from there I'll send you on to Moscow. Understand?" he concluded with his booming laugh.

"Only to Bakhmach," Misha drawled in disappointment. "You're saying that just to tease me."

"Don't be hurt," Polevoy said, patting the blanket again. "You'll do all the fighting you want when you grow up. Tell me better how you happened to

have that dirk?"

Misha flushed.

"Don't be afraid, I shan't eat you," Polevoy laughed.

"I saw it accidentally, honour bright," Misha muttered in embarrassment, "quite accidentally. I took it out to have a look and Grandmother came along! So I hid it under the bed and didn't have time to put it back. I didn't do it on purpose, honest I didn't."

"Did you tell anyone about the dirk?"

"No, I swear I didn't!"

"All right, all right, I believe you," Polevoy calmed him.

"Uncle Seryozha, why's Nikitsky looking for that dirk?"

Polevoy did not reply. He humped his back strangely and stared at the floor.

"Remember I told you about the *Empress Maria*?" he asked, sighing heavily as though he was coming out of a trance.

"Yes."

"Well, Nikitsky was a lieutenant on board that battleship. He v a regular scoundrel, of course, but that's got nothing to do with the story. Nikitsky shot an officer before the explosion; about three minutes before. I was the only witness. That officer had just joined our ship and I even don't know his name. I happened to be near cabin. It would take a long time to tell why I was there, but I had personal accounts to settle with Nikitsky. Well, I stood there and listened to them arguing. Nikitsky called the officer Vladimir. And then, bang—a shot! I rushed into the cabin. The officer was lying the floor and Nikitsky was pulling the dirk out of a suit-case, fired at me ... but missed. After that he snatched up the dirk and went at each other. But before we could have it out a terrific explosion suddenly shook the ship; this was followed by another explosion and I thought the whole world had turned upside down.... I came to on deck, everything round me was roaring, smoking, crashing, and found I was holding the dirk. The sheath must have remained w Nikitsky, but he was gone."

Polevoy paused.

"I was in hospital for some time after that," he continued, "and before I knew it the Revolution had started, then the Civil War. Then this Nikitsky turned up as the leader of a bandit gang. Well, we met. He evidently heard my name mentioned in Revsk and so nosed me out. He raided the town to settle old scores. Seemingly, he now nee the dirk, too. Only he won't get it: what's useful to the enemy harmful to us. But we'll look into it after the war."

Polevoy paused again.

"Nikitsky's batman was a Revsk man," he said thoughtfully though talking to himself. "Thought I'd find him here ... but no ... he's disappeared." Polevoy stood up. "I've lost all track of time talking to you! Tell your mother to pack. We'll be leaving in about two days. Well, good-bye!"

He held Misha's small hand in his big fist, winked slyly at him and went away.

## Chapter 10

### DEPARTURE

The troop train was already drawn up at the railway station and Misha and Genka had been there several times to look at it.

Red Army soldiers were making plank-beds for themselves in the goods-vans and dividing the carriages into stalls for the horses. The boys spied a big iron box under the only passenger carriage.

"Look how comfortable this is, Genka," Misha cried, climbing into the box, "you can sleep here and do anything you like. Nothing to be afraid of, is there? You'll only have to spend one night in it and then you can change into the carriage and I'll ride in the box."

"It's all right for you to talk, but how can I leave my little sister behind?" Genka whimpered.

"Fancy that! His little sister! Why she's only three and won't even notice that you've gone. But look what you'll get instead. You'll go to Moscow!" Misha smacked his lips temptingly. "I'll introduce you to the fellows. We've got some great fellows out there! Slava can play anything you care to name on the piano, without even looking at the music. Shura Ogureyev's an actor: you'd never recognize him when he sticks on a beard. Then there's a first-rate cinema in our block; the pictures it shows are all in three parts at least.... But if you don't want to go, you don't have to. And you won't see the circus, you won't see anything. Suit yourself."

"All right. I'll go," Genka decided.

"That's a good fellow!" Misha said happily. "You'll write home from Bakhmach and say that you've gone to Moscow to Aunt Agrippina, that everything's all right, and that they're not to worry."

The boys walked down the platform where the troop train was drawn up, "Headquarters" was spelled out in chalk on one of the carriages, which had posters nailed to its sides. Misha undertook to explain the pictures to Genka.

"See that one with the crown, cloak, and red nose? That's the tsar. And the man in the white shirt with a whip in his hand is a Cossack sergeant. That's a Menshevik there, in spectacles and straw hat. And this three-headed snake represents generals Denikin, Kolchak, and Yudenich."

"And who's that?" Genka poked a poster.

The man shown in the poster was a bourgeois in a silk top-hat, with a sagging stomach and a predatory beak-shaped nose. He was sitting on a bag of gold, and blood was dripping from the long nails of his fat fingers.

"Are you blind that you can't see he's a bourgeois?" Misha replied. "He's sitting on money. Thinks he can buy the whole world with it."

"Why's 'Entente' written there?"

"It amounts to the same thing. The Entente's an alliance of all the bourgeoisie of world capital against the Soviet power. See?"

"Uh-huh," Genka drawled rather vaguely. "And why's that got

'International' on it?" he asked, pointing at a big plywood board nailed to one of the carriages.

The picture showed the globe bound with chains which a muscular worker was smashing with a sledge hammer.

"That's the International—the union of all the workers of the world," Misha replied. "The worker there," he pointed at the picture, "is the International. And the chains are the Entente. And when these chains are smashed, the workers will rule the whole world, and there won't be any more bourgeoisie."

... At last the day came when they had to leave. The two horses harnessed to a cart near the house were snorting and brushing the flies away with their tails.

The luggage had been taken to the cart and Mother was saying good-bye to Grandfather and Grandmother. There they were on the porch looking very small and old. Grandfather wore his frayed frock-coat and Grandmother was in her greasy dressing-gown, wiping away tears and creasing her face unhappily. Grandfather was sniffing tobacco and smiling through moist eyes,

"Everything'll be all right. Everything'll be all right," he kept muttering.

Misha climbed on to a suit-case and the cart clattered off over the uneven road, jolting and swaying as it went.

When it turned off the Alekseyevskaya into the Privokzalnaya Misha twisted round for a last look at the little wooden cottage with its green shutters and three willows behind the fence.

## **Chapter 11**

### **IN THE TROOP TRAIN**

Misha pressed his face against the carriage window-pane and peered into the darkness outside, which was sprinkled with bright pin-point stars and the station lights.

The drawn-out whistling and puffing of the engines, the clang of the carriages as they were coupled, and the hurried steps and cries of the guards and oilers, rushing up and down near the train with their lanterns dangling like fire-flies in front of them, disturbed the night and filled it with mysterious and repressing anxiety.

Misha looked steadily out of the window and the longer he kept his face pressed to the pane the more distinct became the objects outside.

The train jerked backwards with a clang of its buffers. Then it moved again, forward this time, and, without stopping, thundered past the switches as it picked up speed. The station lights were already left behind. The moon had come out from behind the ragged clouds. Trees, cabins and deserted platforms flashed by in a grey ribbon. . Good-bye Revsk!

The train was not moving when Misha woke up early the next morning.



He jumped out and ran to the box under the carriage to see how Genka was getting along.

The troop train was standing without its engine on a side-track at some station. Except for a sentry dozing on the platform of one of the carriages, the place was deserted. The horses were stamping their hoofs in their stalls.

Misha scratched the box.

"Genka, come out!" he whispered.

No answer. Misha knocked on the box with his knuckles. Silence. He crawled under the carriage and saw that the box was empty. Where could Genka be? Could he have run back home yesterday?

A bugle sounded the reveille, bringing the troop train and the station to life. Soldiers jumped out of the goods-vans and ran to douse themselves with cold water; the men on duty busied themselves with pots and kettles. The smell of porridge filled the air. One soldier called to a comrade, another swore at someone. Then they all lined up in two ranks facing the train and the roll was called.

The men were shabbily dressed, in a variety of uniforms. They wore peaked helmets, grey infantry caps, cavalry caps, round naval caps, and Cossack fur caps. Some had top-boots, others shoes, felt boots, galoshes, and there were even some who were barefoot. There were soldiers and sailors, workers and peasants. The old and the young, the aged and mere boys were standing side by side.

Misha glanced into the headquarters carriage and saw Genka there. He was standing and wiping tears off his face with his sleeve. A young snub-nosed chap with big ears and a pipe between his teeth was sitting behind the table in front of Genka. His patched tunic was criss-crossed with belts and his extremely wide riding breeches had red piping. Every now and then he took the pipe out of his mouth and spat gloomily over the table past Genka, who started each time as if a bullet were flying at him.

"Well then, what did you say your name is?" the chap asked sternly.

"Petrov," Genka snivelled.

"Petrov! You're not lying?"

"No-o-o."

"You know you can't fool me!"

"But it's the truth, I swear it is!" Genka sobbed.

The chap paused, sucked at his pipe and spat, after which the questioning continued, with the questions and answers being repeated over and over again.

Genka was arrested! Misha sprang away from the carriage and ran to find Polevoy. He was with a group of officers inspecting the guns on the flat-cars.

"Sergei Ivanovich," Misha said, appealing to him, "Genka's been arrested over there. Please let him go. He's going to Moscow with us."

"Who arrested your Genka?" Polevoy asked in surprise.

"Over there, at headquarters. An officer in blue riding breeches, a young officer."

Polevoy exchanged glances with the other officers and started laughing.

"That's Styopa for you," one of them guffawed.

"All right," Polevoy said, "come on, we'll see what we can do. Maybe the officer'll let him go."

When Genka's tormentor saw the officers climbing into the carriage he sprang to his feet, hastily hid the pipe in his pocket, and, bringing his hand up to his broken peak in a salute, stood stiffly in front of Polevoy.

"Comrade Commander, permit me to report that we've detained a suspected criminal," he said in a weak bass and pointed to the sobbing Genka. "According to my investigations he confessed himself guilty that his surname's Petrov, first name's Genka, that he ran away from his parents and is going to Moscow to his aunt. His father's an engine-driver. I found no weapons on him: only three empty cartridge-cases used in Nagant revolvers. He was caught red-handed sleeping in an empty box under the carriage."

A short chap, somewhat taller than Genka, he lowered his hand but stood stiffly at attention as before, oblivious to the laughter around him. Polevoy suppressed his mirth and looked sternly at Genka.

"Why did you get under the carriage?"

Genka's sobs grew louder.

"Uncle, word of honour, I'm going to Moscow, to my aunt. He can tell you," Genka pointed to Misha.

"We'll straighten it out," Polevoy said. "You, Styopa," he turned to the chap who had arrested Genka, "run for the sergeant and tell him to report to me."

"Right!" Styopa said smartly, saluted, wheeled about, and hopped out of the carriage.

"And you," Polevoy turned to the boys, "out you go, quick march."

Genka climbed out, but Misha lingered behind for a minute.

"Who's that chap?" he asked Polevoy in a whisper.

"Oh, brother!" Polevoy laughed. "He's a big man here. Stepan Ivanovich Reznikov, the chief messenger boy at our headquarters."

## **Chapter 12**

### **THE RAILWAY GUARD'S CABIN**

For two weeks the troop train was held up at Nizkovka.

"Bakhmach won't let us through; there aren't enough engines," Genka explained.

He considered himself an expert on railway matters because his father was an engine-driver.

Genka now had legal status in the troop train. His father had found him, tweaked his ears, and had wanted to take him back to Revsk, but Polevoy and Misha's mother had intervened.

Polevoy invited Genka's father to his carriage. The boys did not know what they spoke about there, but when they came out Genka's father

announced with a frown that he would not take Genka home that day, but would return to Revsk and do "as Mother decides."

He came back the next day with Genka's clothes and a letter for Aunt Agrippina. After giving his son a long lecture, he returned home to Revsk with a promise from Misha's mother to "deliver" Genka safely to his aunt.

Meanwhile, there was still no sign that the troop train would leave Nizkovka. The Red Army men lit fires between the tracks and cooked their meals in mess-tins. The black ash left by these fires would smoulder redly in the evenings and, in the carriages, someone would play an accordion, another a balalaika, and voices would join in singing folk-songs. The men would sit on the scattered sleepers, the railway lines or simply on the ground, talk about politics, railway regulations, God, but mostly about food.

There was a shortage of food; and one day Misha and Genka set out for the woods to gather mushrooms.

The boys went off early in the morning, as the woods were far away, about five versts from the station; they expected to be back by nightfall, but things turned out differently.

They were given the wrong directions and walked more than five versts before they realized their mistake. Misha and Genka spent the whole day wandering in the woods, and when finally they had filled their baskets with mushrooms and turned back, twilight had already set in. Moreover, the sky was completely overcast and rain began to fall.

"Why are sleepers placed so irregularly under the rails?" Misha wondered as he walked beside Genka along the track. "You can't walk in step properly. An ordinary road's better any day."



The track lay on an embankment stretching across endless fields; a small village standing far, far away showed through the film of rain from time to time, and the boys thought they heard the mooing of cows, the barking of dogs and the squeaking crank of a well, in fact all the distant sounds that rain usually brings to the ear of a traveller when he sees some habitation.

It was already dark when they reached the railway guard's cabin. From there it was three versts to Nizkovka.

"Let's go in," Genka suggested.

"What for? We'll only waste time."

"Why get soaked in the rain? We can spend the night here and go on in the morning."

"No. Mother'll worry. And the troop train might move off."

"Phew!" Genka whistled. "It won't budge for another week. And even if it does, this is the track to Bakhmach. We'll be sure to catch it. Oh, come on! Let's get a drink of water at least."

They knocked on the door. A dog chained near the fence barked angrily.

"What d'you want?" a woman's voice asked behind the door.

"Auntie," Genka piped in a thin voice, "we only want some water."

The barking was savage now and the dog tore at its chain.

The bolt was drawn back, the door opened, and the boys walked through the narrow passage into a low but roomy hut.

Someone moved restlessly on the stove.

"Who is it, Matryona?" said an old man in a sleepy voice.

"Boys," the woman replied, scratching her side and yawning. "Came in for a drink. Been out gathering mushrooms?" she asked them.

"Uh-huh."

"Where're you going?"

"To Nizkovka."

"A bit far, that is," the woman drawled. "Aren't you afraid to walk about at night?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying, auntie," Genka said, jumping at her remark. "Perhaps you'll let us stay overnight?"

"Why not! There's room enough. I can't push you out at night into the rain, can I? It's pouring cats and dogs," the woman said, pulling a sheepskin coat off the stove and spreading it on the floor. "Yes, and there are bad men about. And then a train might run you over. Here, lie down. Sleep till it's light, then it won't take you long to reach the station."

She latched the door, blew out the taper and climbed on the stove-couch with a groan. The boys made themselves comfortable on the sheepskin coat and quickly fell asleep.

## Chapter 13

### BANDITS

The dream Misha had was all jumbled. A black foal, its short tail flying in the wind, plunged and kicked out with its hind legs, then raced across a field near the foot of a sheer cliff. Everybody laughed. Polevoy, Grandfather, Slava, Nikitsky.... They were all laughing at him, at Misha. Now the foal stopped and shook its head fitfully, now it kicked out with its legs and sped

across the field again.

Suddenly it was not a foal any longer, but a horse; a huge black horse. It threw itself against the steep cliff and began clambering up....

It looked like an enormous black fly as it climbed, and Nikitsky rapped a tree with the handle of his whip and shouted: "Catch that horse, catch it!"

The horse's movements grew slower and slower.

"Catch that horse, catch it!" Nikitsky shouted.

Suddenly the horse lost its hold and hurtled down into the abyss with a terrifying clatter... The clatter broke off at Misha's feet: a pail clattered once more and then lay still.

"Catch that horse!" a voice again shouted from the hut into the yard and swore. "Ah, the devil take it! They *had* to put that pail there!"

Someone struck a match. Its dim light revealed a tall man in a felt cloak. Horses were neighing in the yard and the dog was barking furiously.

"Who's that?" the man in the felt cloak asked, pointing his whip to the boys lying in the corner.

"Lads from the station; been gathering mushrooms," the railway guard replied with a frown. He was standing in his underwear, a taper in his hand; his tangled beard threw a dancing shadow on the wall. "But they're asleep, you needn't worry!"

"Shut your mouth!" the man in the felt cloak yelled at him.

He went up to the boys and bent down to peer at them. Misha pretended he was sleeping and in the split second when he half opened his eyes he caught the flash of a piercing glance from under a black forelock and a Caucasian fur cap.... Nikitsky!

Nikitsky turned to the railway guard.

"Has the engine for Nizkovka passed yet?"

"Yes," the old man replied sullenly.

"Why, you old devil!" Nikitsky grabbed him by his shirt, gave it a twist, and hit the railway guard across the face with the handle of his whip. "The train's due to pass in an hour and you didn't even tell us?" He hit him again, and rushed out of the hut.

The old man slumped to the floor.

Voices and the thud of hoofs sounded in the yard and then all was silent. Only the dog continued to bark and pull at its chain.

Misha thought over everything he had heard. The train was due to pass in an hour! From Nizkovka! The engine had already gone there. Could it be their troop train? And suddenly the fearful thought that the bandits were laying an ambush for the train crossed Misha's mind. What could he do? How could he warn Polevoy? He and Genka would never reach Nizkovka in an hour.

The railway guard groaned. The old woman fussed over him with sighs and lamentations. Misha shook Genka.

"Get up! D'you hear, Genka? Get up!"

"What, what d'you want?" Genka mumbled sleepily.

Misha pulled him, but Genka kicked and tried to curl up on the sheepskin coat again.

"Get up," Misha whispered, "get up!" He shook Genka roughly. "Get up! Nikitsky's here. They want to attack the troop train."

The boys stole out of the hut quietly.

The rain had stopped, but a damp smell rose from the ground, and water dripped monotonously from the roof. The full moon lit up the edges of the thinning clouds, the railway line and the gleaming rails. The dog's dismal and eerie howling made the boys' flesh creep.

They fled in terror, following a path by the side of the embankment. They had not gone far when they stopped short at the sight of dark figures on the line. The clang of heavy iron told them the bandits were pulling the rails apart.

They were working at the highest point on the embankment, near a small bridge thrown across a deep gully. The sounds of horses neighing, branches rustling and cracking, and muffled voices came from a grove on the side of the gully. The boys noiselessly slipped down the embankment, by-passed the grove, and ran as fast as they could.



The cold dawn made objects clearer and clearer as it pushed back the horizon. The boys could already see the station lights, and in their desperate race for the station they neither felt the sharp stones that cut their feet nor heard the wind screeching in their ears. The drawn-out whistle of an engine suddenly reached them. They stopped for a second, then ran forward again, their eyes glued to the bent iron hand-rails of the engine which had wreathes of white steam curling round them. The hand-rails grew bigger and bigger, so big that they hid the engine. Just as Misha was about to stretch out to grip them a strong hand fell on his shoulder.... It was Polevoy.

"Well, where've you been loafing?" he asked sternly.

"Sergei Ivanovich," Misha panted. "Nikitsky's over there."

"Where?" Polevoy asked quickly.

"Over there—in the railway guard's cabin. They're in the gully now."

"In the gully?"

"Yes."

"So 'that's what they're up to. . ." Polevoy thought for a second. "And we

waited for them here. Thanks, lads! And now off you go to the carriage! And see that you don't leave it, or I'll have you put under lock and key."

## Chapter 14

### FAREWELL

The battle was soon over. The bandits were routed. In their flight they did not stop to carry away their dead. Riderless horses tore up and down the field; they were caught and unsaddled by the Red Army soldiers, who then drove them up planks into the carriages. The rails were speedily repaired and the train continued its journey.

When they arrived in Bakhmach the boys learned that the troop train was making only a short stop before leaving for the front. The passenger carriage was uncoupled and left to wait for a Moscow-bound train.

Polevoy called Misha over before the troop train pulled out, and they sat down in the shade of a warehouse: Misha on the ground and Polevoy on an empty box. They sat there without talking, each engrossed in his own thoughts, and it was quite possible that both were thinking of the same thing. Finally, Polevoy looked up at Misha and smiled.

"Well, Mikhail Grigoryevich, what have you got to say at parting?"

Misha did not reply; only lowered his eyes.

"Yes," Polevoy said, "the time's come for us to part, Misha, my lad. I don't know if we'll see each other again, so look here."

He took the dirk out and held it in the palm of his left hand. The dirk had not changed; it had the same yellowed handle with the bronze serpent around it.

With his right hand Polevoy twisted the handle in the direction of the serpent's head. The handle rose along the spiral of the serpent's body until it came off altogether.

Polevoy disengaged the serpent from the handle and pulled out a little tube made of very thin metal plate and covered with unintelligible signs: dots, dashes, and circles.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked.

"A code," Misha said uncertainly with a questioning look at Polevoy.

"Correct," Polevoy confirmed, "it's a code. Only the key to this code is in the sheath and Nikitsky has it. See now why he wanted the dirk?"

Misha nodded.

"A man was killed for this dirk; that means there's some mystery about it. I thought of clearing it up, but now's not the time for that," he sighed, "and I can't carry the dirk with me any longer. Who can tell what may happen, especially with the war. So here, take it." He held out the dirk to Misha. "Take it," Polevoy repeated. "If I come back from the front I'll attend to it, and if I don't return," he looked at Misha and winked playfully, "if I don't return, this'll be something to remember me by."

Misha took the dirk.

"Why don't you say something?" Polevoy asked. "Are you afraid?"

"No. What is there to be afraid of?" Misha replied.



"Then remember," Polevoy said, "don't wag your tongue unnecessarily. Especially," he looked at Misha, "beware of one man."

"Nikitsky?"

"Nikitsky will never dream you have anything to do with it. Besides, I doubt if you'll ever see him again. There's another man. I didn't find him here. But he's a Revsk man, too. You may chance upon him—so mind you beware of him."

"Who is he?"

Polevoy gave Misha another glance.

"You've got to beware of him and not show you're doing it. name's Filin."

"Filin," Misha repeated thoughtfully. "We have a Filin living near us in Moscow."

"What's his first name and patronymic?"

"I don't know. But I know his son—Borka. The fellows call Skinflint."

"Skinflint," Polevoy laughed. "Is he from Revsk?"

"I don't know."

"Well, Filin's a common name, you know," Polevoy mused. "I believe Revsk's half full of them. But I don't think the one I mean is in Moscow. I'm sure he's hidden deeper. But be careful all the same. They're a tough crowd, dangerous. Understand?"

"Yes," Misha replied quietly.

"Courage, Mikhail Grigoryevich!" Polevoy slapped him on the shoulder. "You're a man already, one can say. You've weighed anchor. Only remember..."

He rose. Misha did the same.

"Only remember, Misha, my lad, life's like a sea. If ever you think of living for yourself, you'll be like a lonely fisherman in a rotten, leaky boat: you'll always be keeping to the shallows, looking at one and the same shore, and plugging holes with torn trousers. But if you live for the people, you'll sail on a big ship and a broad expanse will open before you. No storm can then frighten you! The whole world will be yours! You for your comrades and your comrades for you. See? Well, that's fine!" He stretched out his hand to Misha, smiled again, and strode off along the uneven sleepers, tall, strong, with his grey army great-coat thrown across his shoulders.

A meeting was held before the train departed. Many townspeople and depot workers gathered at the station. Girls walked up and down the platform, eating sunflower seeds and exchanging smiles with the soldiers.

The meeting was opened by Polevoy, who stood on the roof of the headquarters carriage, over the shield with the emblem of the International. He said that danger was threatening Soviet Russia, that the bourgeoisie of the whole world had attacked the young Soviet Republic; he was confident that the power of the workers and peasants would crush all its enemies and that the banner of Freedom would rise over our Motherland. When Polevoy finished everybody shouted "Hurrah!"

The next speaker was a soldier. He said there was a shortage of supplies in the army, but its unbending spirit and its faith in the just cause made it invincible. He was also applauded and people shouted "Hurrah!" Misha and

Genka, who were sitting on the roof of the carriage, also clapped enthusiastically and their "Hurrahs!" were the loudest of all.

The troop train pulled out of the station after the meeting. Red Army soldiers crowded the open doors of the goods-vans; some sat and dangled their feet, showing their worn shoes and torn leggings, others stood behind them and all sang the *Internationale*. The notes of the anthem filled the station, burst out into the wide steppes, and floated across the boundless land.

The crowd on the platform caught up the anthem. Misha sang in his clear voice. His heart swelled as he sang the words, a shiver of pride ran down his spine, a lump rose in his throat choking the words, and tears he could not control filled his eyes. The train grew smaller and smaller, and finally disappeared with a wave of its long, curved tail.

Evening kindled twinkling lights in the sky, the crowd dispersed, leaving the platform deserted.

But Misha did not go away.

He stood looking in the direction where the train had disappeared, where the glittering tangle of rails merged into one narrow steel line that cut into the humped, misty horizon. And in his mind's eye he saw the Red Army soldiers inside the troop train, Polevoy in his grey army great-coat, and the muscular worker breaking with his sledge hammer the chains fettering the globe.





## Part II

### THE COURT IN ARBAT STREET

#### Chapter 15

#### A YEAR LATER

A noise in the corridor awakened Misha. He opened his eyes and promptly shut them again. A short ray of sunlight had crept into the room past the tall neighbouring buildings and was shining on the millions of dust particles dancing between the window and the rug on the floor. The striped tiger embroidered on the rug was also dozing with its eyes screwed up and its head resting on outstretched paws. It was decrepit old tiger, threadbare and harmless.

The ray narrowed and moved slowly across the room, from the rug to the edge of the table. It threw a light on the nickel-plating on Mother's bed, it shone on the sewing-machine and disappeared abruptly as if it had never been there.

The room became darker. An open window squeaked lightly and from Arbat Street and the court-yard below came the warning bells of the tram-cars, the honk-honk of motor-cars, the merry voices of children, and the cries of the knife-grinders and old clothes men—all combining to make the discordant sounds of a city street in spring-time.

Misha dozed. He wanted to go back to sleep, for it would not do to get up at the usual time on the first day of the holidays. He could idle away the

whole day. How splendid!

Mother entered with a flat-iron. She spread a folded blanket on the table and put the iron on an overturned samovar ring. On a char beside her was a heap of rough-dry washing.

"Get up, Misha," Mother said. "Get up, son."

Misha made no move. Why did Mother always know whether he was sleeping or not? After all he had his eyes shut.

"Get up, don't pretend," Mother said, coming up to the bed.

It was as much as he could do to keep from laughing. When Mother slipped her hand under the blanket Misha brought his knees up to his chin, but her cold hand followed his heels relentlessly. This was too much for Misha. He sprang out of bed with a peal of laughter.

He dressed quickly and went to the kitchen. The white-tiled floor gleamed in the dim light. The water-pipe had burst in the winter and now the grey walls were striped with long dark lines. Misha took his shirt off, firmly intending to give himself a cold rub-down. He had decided long ago to make this a habit and promised himself to begin as soon as the holidays started. He turned on the tap with a shiver; a gushing stream ran into the wash-bowl and splashes of icy water stung Misha's shoulders. Brrr.... A bit too cold, that. To be sure, he had resolved to start this business the first day of the holidays, but... the term had ended two weeks earlier. The holidays should have started on June 1, and now it was only May 15. Could he be blamed if the school had been closed for repairs? All right: he would have the first rub-down on June 1. And Misha pulled on his shirt.

He looked closely at himself in the mirror as he stood in front of it combing his hair. That chin of his was no good! If it had jutted out he would have had a lot of will-power. That was what Jack London wrote. And he needed strong will-power badly. Why, just a few minutes ago he had failed in his decision to rub himself down with cold water. The same thing had happened every time he made up his mind to do something. Look at the diary he had wanted to keep. He had started a note-book but he had not gone farther than the first page—his patience had given out. What about morning exercises? Hadn't he dropped them, too? And those excuses lie always gave himself! It was downright laziness, nothing more. Then what about his habit of postponing things? Monday, the first of the month, the new school term... these were the dates to which he usually postponed anything he thought of doing. It was enough to make one sick just to think of it. Weakling, you've got no backbone, he told himself. About time to stop all that. Misha stuck out his chin. There, that was the kind of chin a man with strong will-power should have. You had to hold your teeth like that all the time; that would gradually make the chin jut out.

Potatoes were steaming on the table, and the day's ration of two slices of black bread lay on a plate beside them. Misha cut his slice into three—breakfast, dinner, supper—and took one piece. He hardly noticed how he ate it, it was so small, and he wondered if he should take the second piece. Dinner could be had without bread.... No! That would not do! If he ate up all his ration now Mother would be sure to give him her portion in the evening

and go without bread. Misha put the bread back and as he stuck his chin out resolutely, he forgot that he was eating a hot potato and painfully bit his tongue.

## Chapter 16

### THE BOOKCASE

Misha wanted to go outdoors after breakfast.

"Where are you going?" Mother stopped him.

"For a walk."

"In the court-yard?"

"Yes... I'll go into the court-yard, too."

"What about your books?" she wetted her finger and touched the iron.

"Who's going to put your books away?"

"But Mother, I simply haven't any time for that now."

"That means / have to put them away for you?" Mother put the iron down on the ring and looked questioningly at Misha.

"All right, I'll do it," Misha mumbled. "You're always like that: getting at me when every minute counts!"

Misha's shelf was the second from the bottom. The case was meant for books, but as they had no cupboard or a dresser, it was used for clothes and crockery.

Misha took the books out, swept the dust off the shelf with a shoe brush and spread a newspaper on it. Then he sat on the floor and sorted out the books, putting them back one by one.

Two volumes of the *Brokhaus and Efron Encyclopaedia* were the first to go back on the shelf. Misha prized them most. A fellow with all the eighty-six volumes need not go to school: he could get a higher education by just learning the whole encyclopaedia by heart.

The *Brokhaus* was followed by *The World of Adventure* in two volumes, Nikolai Gogol's *Collected Works* in one volume, Tolstoy's *Childhood, Adolescence and Youth*, Goncharov's *Oblomov*, and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

But what was this? Hm! Charskaya... *Princess Javaha*.... Misha hesitated about putting it back. A trashy book, if ever there was one! Sloppy! For girls! The binding was the only good thing about it. Slava might agree to swap it for some other book. He liked beautifully-bound books. Misha went to the window and threw it open.

The noise and rumble of the street invaded the room. The buildings in the long blocks were of different heights and they stretched out in all directions. The latticed iron balconies looked glued to them, so did the narrow fire escapes. The Moscow River flowed in a winding blue ribbon, while, seen from a distance, the bridges looked like black bands holding down this ribbon. The golden dome of the nearest church glittered with a thousand suns, and behind it the Kremlin thrust the sharp spires of its towers high into

the sky.

Misha leaned out of the window and turned his face towards the neighbouring house.

"Slav-a-a!" he called.

Slava, a pale boy with long thin fingers, looked out of a third-storey window. His friends teasingly called him "bourgeois" because he always wore a bow tie, played the piano, and never fought. His mother was a famous singer and his father was chief engineer at the Sverdlov Factory in which Misha's mother, Genka's aunt, and many other tenants in the block worked. The factory had been idle for a long time and now preparations were being made to get it working again.

"Slava," Misha called, "want to swop?" He waved the book. "A real corker! *Princess Javaha*. You won't be able to tear yourself away from it!"

"No," Slava shouted. "I've got it already."

"Doesn't matter. Just look at the binding! Like it? You can have it for your *Gadfly*." "No!"

"All right! You needn't then! Later you'll ask for it yourself, but it'll be too late."

"When are you going out?" Slava asked. "Soon."

"Come to Genka's. I'll be there." "All right."

Misha hopped off the window-sill and put the book on the shelf. It can stay there for a while, he thought, and in the autumn he would see if anybody at school would like to give him something for it.

*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, In the Wilds of Africa, The Leather Stocking, The Headless Horseman....* All about cowboys, prairies, Red Indians, scalps, mustangs.... These were *real* books!

Now for the text-books: Kiselyov, Rybkin, Krayevich, Shaposhnikov and Valtsev....



He had hardly opened them last year. The school had not been heated and it had been so cold that the boys' fingers froze and they could not write. But they had attended school all the same. For the hot soup. The winter of nineteen hundred and twenty-one had been a severe and hungry one.

Misha put away his exercise-books, stamp album, the compasses with the bent needle, the set-square with the obliterated divisions, and his protractor. Then with a sidelong glance at Mother he felt for his secret package which was hidden behind a bundle of old magazine supplements.

The dirk was there. Misha felt the hard steel of the blade through the cloth. Where was Polevoy now? Only one letter had come from him and nothing more. But Misha was sure he would come. Fighting was still going on in some places, though the war was over. The White Finns had been chased out of Karelia only last February. In the Far East our soldiers were pushing the Japanese interventionists into the sea. But the Entente was already preparing for a new war. Everything was pointing to that.

Nikitsky had probably been killed by this time; or he had fled across the frontier like other White officers. He had the sheath, and the mystery of the dirk would never be unveiled.

Misha's thoughts turned to Filin, Borka's father, who managed the storehouse. Who was he? Could he be the same Filin that Polevoy had spoken about? Misha thought he came from Revsk.



He had asked Mother several times about him, but she was not sure; but Genka's Aunt Agrippina knew. When Misha had casually asked about Film, she spat and said angrily:

"I don't know and I don't care to know. He's a bad lot. The whole breed's the same."

Misha could not make Aunt Agrippina say anything else, but since she had mentioned the "breed" he felt that she knew something. It was impossible to get anything out of her. A tall, stout woman, she was hard nut to crack, and there was no one stricter in the whole block. All the tenants

were afraid of her, even the house-manager; he obsequiously referred to her as "our very voluminous Agrippina Tikhonovna." She was also a "delegate" (The author has in mind the elective public office of organizer of cultural and political work among women. This office existed in the first years after the establishment of Soviet power and aimed at drawing women into active social and political work and production.—*Ed.*) and that made her the most important woman at the factory. Genka alone was not afraid of her: even a trifling row was enough to make him start packing and announce that he was going back to Revsk. That always made Aunt Agrippina give in.

... Was there *any* way to find out about Filin? Why hadn't he thought of asking Polevoy for the man's first name and patronymic?

Misha sighed, carefully hid the dirk behind the supplements and closed the bookcase. There was nothing to keep him at home now he went to Genka's.

## Chapter 17

### GENKA

The boys were playing chess with the board and chessmen on a chair. Slava was standing and Genka was sitting on the edge of a wide bed covered with a quilt. The pillows were piled high in a pyramid the tip of which almost reached a small icon hanging near the ceiling.

Genka's aunt was kneading dough on the table beside them. She seemed annoyed about something, for when Misha entered the room she greeted him with a stern look.

"Where on earth have you been?" Genka cried to Misha. "Take a look, I'll checkmate him in three moves.... Here: *ein, zwei, drei.*"

"*Zwei, dreil*" Aunt Agrippina said suddenly. "Get up from the bed! A nice place you've found to sit on!"

Genka moved slightly, as if preparing to get up.

"Don't fidget, but get up! Who do you think I'm talking to?"

Aunt Agrippina attacked the dough fiercely with her rolling pin, then turned to Genka again.

"For shame! A big lad like you, hacking away at the cabbage and spoiling the whole head! Tell me why you had to cut it?"

"All right, I'll tell you: I wanted the stump. You don't need it anyway."

"Then couldn't you have cut it out carefully, you blockhead? I was saving that head for stuffed cabbage-rolls and now you've gone and spoiled all the leaves."

"Meat rolled in cabbage leaves, Auntie," Genka replied slowly, his mind on his next move, "is a petty-bourgeois prejudice. We're not bourgeoisie to eat cabbage-rolls. Anyway they wouldn't have been the proper thing; you'd have stuffed them with millet, wouldn't you? Meat stuffing would have been different."



"Are you trying to teach me, young man?"

"I'm surprised at you, Auntie, honestly I am," Genka chattered on, his eyes fixed on the chessmen. "You're an important person, so to speak, and here you are getting excited about stuffed cabbage-rolls.

Getting yourself all hot and bothered about a miserable little stump. Upsetting your health."

"My health's no business of yours," Aunt Agrippina grumbled, cutting the dough into noodles. "That's enough, shut up. Shut up, I say, or I'll have this rolling pin on you."

"All right. But don't threaten me with that rolling pin. You won't hit me anyway."

"Why do you think so?" Aunt Agrippina asked, formidably straightening to her full height.

"You won't."

"Why won't I, I'm asking you?"

"Why?" Genka picked up a pawn and held it thoughtfully in his hand. "Because you love me, Auntie dear; love and respect me."

"Oh, you're such a silly boy," Aunt Agrippina laughed. "Why are you so silly?"

"Mate!" Slava announced suddenly.

"Where? Where? Where've you mated me?" Genka asked in alarm. "You're right. See that, Auntie," he added plaintively, "I've lost a won game because of your cabbage-rolls."

"No harm done, I'm sure!" Aunt Agrippina said, going off to the kitchen.

"What's the matter with you, Genka, quarrelling with your aunt all the time?" Slava asked. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

"Me? Quarrelling? You're talking through your hat! Call that quarrelling? It's just her way of talking, that's all," Genka said, setting up the chessmen.

"Let's have a game, Misha."

"No," Misha said. "Let's go down to the court-yard. What's the sense of staying here."

Genka put away the chessmen, folded the board and the boys went out of the house.

## **Chapter 18**

### **BORKA, THE SKINFLINT**

It was already May, but the snow in the court-yard had not yet thawed.

The snow-drifts that had heaped up during the winter had settled, blackened, compressed, but, sheltered by eight-storeyed buildings crowding closely together, they had not capitulated to the sun. On clear days sunbeams crept into the court-yard and dozed on a narrow strip of asphalt, where the girls had chalked off squares for hop-scotch, then rose slowly higher and

higher up the wall until they hid behind the buildings.

The boys were playing penny-pitching with big tsarist five-kopek pieces. Genka tried to reach Misha's coin by stretching his fingers out as much as they would go.

"No use. You won't reach it," Misha said. "You won't. Shoot, Skinflint. Your turn."

"See if I don't hit it right on the head," Borka muttered, aiming at Slava's coin, "right on the head. There!" His big flattened five-kopek piece hit Slava's. "Shell out, bourgeois!"

The blood rushed to Slava's face.

"I've lost everything already," he said. "I'll owe it you."

"Then why did you butt in?" Borka shouted. "No one plays on credit here. Give me the money."

"I've told you already that I haven't any. I'll pay you when I win it back."

"So that's what you want!" Borka cried, seizing Slava's coin. "You'll get this back when you pay up."

"Who gave you the right?" Slava asked, his voice trembling and a red spot showing on his pale cheeks. "Who gave you the right to do that?"

"I've got the right," Borka muttered, hiding the coin in his pocket. "You'll know better next time."

Misha offered Borka a kopek.

"Here, give him back his aimer. And you, Slava, don't play when you haven't any money."

"I won't take it," Borka grumbled, shaking his head. "I won't take anyone else's. Let him pay up himself."

"Want to play the skinflint?"

"Maybe I do."

"Well, you won't. Give Slava back his aimer."

"You keep out of it!" Borka snapped angrily. "D'you think you own the place?"

"Are you going to give it back?" Misha said stepping up to Borka.

"Let him have it, Misha!" Genka shouted, also closing in on Borka.

"Get back, Genka, I'll manage this myself," Misha said, pushing Genka away. "I'm asking you for the last time: will you give it back?"

Borka stepped away and averted his eyes. The coin rang against the stones.

"There! And I hope he chokes! Who d'you think you are, defending people?" he said, walking away with a spiteful look at Misha.

The game was spoilt. The boys lolled in the sun on the warm asphalt near the wall.

The crowns of the stunted trees muffled the sound of bells pealing from the church near by. Washing fluttered on the clothes-lines stretched out between the trees, and the wooden clothes-pegs shook as they leaned from one side to another. A woman was washing windows in an apartment on the fifth floor.



Misha sat on a pile of rusty radiators making faces at Borka. So it didn't come off? You didn't succeed in pocketing someone else's money. He had earned the name of skinflint without a doubt. You could always find him at Smolensk Market selling cigarettes and toffees; he would lick the toffees to give them a shine. And his father, Filin, the storehouse manager, was always on the make, too.

Meanwhile Borka was telling the boys about "hoppers" as if nothing had happened.

"Hoppers wrap themselves in a sheet," Borka was saying between sniffs, "hold a torch in their mouths and tie springs to their feet. They jump from the street right to the fifth floor and rob everyone. They can jump over houses, too. As soon as a militiaman comes up they take one jump and land in the next street."

"Go on!" Misha drawled with a contemptuous gesture. "You're just a gas-bag. 'Hoppers'," he mimicked Borka. "You'd do better to tell us about the cellars and the corpses you've seen there."

"If you want to know," Borka said, "there are corpses in the cellars. It's where there used to be a cemetery. At night they howl and groan and it's horrible."

"There's nothing in your cellars," Misha said. "You can tell those lies to someone else. Cemeteries and ghosts, what rubbish!"

"But there used to be a cemetery," Borka insisted. "And it has a secret passage under the whole of Moscow. Tsar Ivan Grozny built it."

Everybody laughed.

"Ivan Grozny lived four hundred years ago," Misha said, "and it's only ten years since our house was built. You can't even tell a good lie."

"So you call me a liar!" Borka said with a spiteful smirk. "Come down the cellars with me and I'll show you the underground passages and the corpses."

"Don't go, Misha," Genka said. "He'll take you there and then play some dirty trick on you."

That was Borka's favourite ruse. He knew the cellars under the huge

building better than any of the boys, and when he got any of them to go down with him he would suddenly stop talking and keep quite still and let the pitch darkness do its work. His companion would invariably lose his way and call out to him, but Borka would turn a deaf ear. He would lead his victim out of the cellars only after torturing him and extracting a promise of a reward.

"We aren't fools," continued Genka, who had already gone through the experience. "Go down into the cellars yourself."

"All right, then," Borka said, feigning indifference. "If you've got cold feet, you needn't come."

"Who are you referring to?" Misha asked, flaring up.

"Oh, no one in particular." Borka shrugged his shoulders. "I just meant people who're afraid to go into the cellars."

"In that case... Come on!" Misha said, getting up.

The two boys crossed into the fore-court and went down into the cellars, carefully feeling their way along the clammy walls. Borka led the way. The earth was loose, and bits of tin and broken glass tinkled under their boots.

Misha knew that Borka wanted to make a fool of him. All right, he would see who came out on top.

They pushed on in the pitch dark and when they had gone quite a distance Borka stopped suddenly.

"So it's starting," Misha thought. "Well, will your corpses appear soon?" he asked, trying to make his voice sound as natural as possible.

But the only answer was a muffled echo that died away in some distant unseen corners.

Borka did not reply, but Misha felt he was somewhere very near, and decided not to call out to him any more.

Several uneasy minutes went by in this way. Both boys held their breath as each waited for the other to speak first. Then Misha softly turned round and went back, groping for the turns. Never mind, he was sure he would find the way by himself and when he did so he would close the door and keep Borka here for a good half hour. That would teach him.

Misha proceeded quietly and, in the stillness, he heard faint footfalls behind him: Borka was stealthily following him. So he was losing his nerve! He did not want to be left there alone!

Misha went on. There was something wrong, he thought, for instead of widening, the passage was getting narrower. Still he went on and on. How could Borka see in this darkness? What if he left him here and he could not find the way? That was enough to give anyone the creeps.

The passage narrowed so that Misha's shoulders brushed both walls. He stopped. Should he call out to Borka? No, not for anything. He raised his hand and felt a cold iron pipe running overhead. Water was gurgling somewhere. Suddenly he heard a loud rustling above his head. He thought that a huge toad had jumped on him, and he threw himself forward; there was no ground under his feet and he fell headlong down a hole....

He picked himself up after he had recovered from the first shock; the fall had done him no harm and it was lighter here and he could dimly make out

the grey uneven walls. He was in a narrow passage running at right angles to the one he had fallen from and it was about two feet lower down.

"Mi-sha-a!" Borka's dark figure appeared in the upper passage. "Misha! Where are you?"

Misha did not reply. Borka had had to talk first, after all! Well, let him search now.

Misha pressed to the wall and kept still.

"Misha, Misha, where are you?" Borka muttered. He was worried and craned his neck to peer into the passage. "Why don't you answer? Misha...."

"Where's your underground passage?" Misha scoffed. "And the corpses? Show me!"

"This is the underground passage," Borka whispered, "Only you mustn't go along it. That's where the coffins and corpses are."

"A lot I care for your corpses!" Misha said and started off into the passage. But Borka caught him by the shoulder.

"Look, Misha," he whispered anxiously. "Listen to me, let's go back, or it'll be the worse for us."

"What are you trying to scare me for?"

"Look here, don't go. We won't find anything without a torch anyway. I'll get one to-morrow, and then we'll go."

"D'you mean it? I know you, after all!"

"Cross my heart! May I be struck dead if I lie! But if you don't come back, then you'd better watch out: I'll go away and won't return. You'll never get out by yourself."

"And a lot I care!" Misha replied scornfully, but all the same he groped his way out of the cellars after Borka.

The bright sunlight at the entrance dazzled their eyes. "Mind you come to-morrow morning," Misha said. "All right, it's a bargain," Borka replied.

## Chapter 19

### SHURA BOLSHOI

Shura Ogureyev appeared in the court-yard. He was the tallest boy there and all his friends called him Shura Bolshoi. (*Bolshoi—big.—Tr*) They considered him a great actor and he was a member of the amateur dramatic circle in the club that had its headquarters in the basement of the first block. The house management that ran the club did not allow boys to join. Shura Bolshoi was the exception, and he was very proud of it.

"Hello, Daddy Longshanks!" Misha greeted him.

Shura gave him a haughty look.

"What childish ways you have, indeed! I should have thought you'd grown out of your infancy!"

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Genka said. "Where'd they teach you that? In the club?"

"That's none of your business." Shura made a significant pause. "Of course you know only adults are allowed to join the club."

"Don't make me laugh!" Misha said. "You've grown about a mile long. That's why they let you join."

"I'm one of the leading actors," Shura answered importantly, "and if you're jealous, say so."

"They aren't letting us join because we're not organized," Slava said, "but I've heard there's a Young Communist organization in Krasnaya Presnya and they have their own club."

"Yes, that's true," Shura confirmed authoritatively, "only it has another name. I've forgotten it. But it's for children. Grown-ups join the Komsomol."

This was a hint that he was regularly attending the Komsomol cell at the factory and intended joining it.

"Splendid," Misha mused. "Kids having their own organization!"

"They're probably boy scouts," Genka said. "You're making a mistake somewhere, Slava."

"No, I'm not. Scouts wear blue ties and these kids wear red ones."

"Red?" Misha asked. "Well, if their ties are red then they're for the Soviets. And then, there couldn't be boy scouts in Krasnaya Presnya. It's the most proletarian district in the city."

"Yes, they're for the Soviets," Shura chimed in.

"And they have their own club?"

"Of course," Shura said. "They all have membership cards," he added uncertainly.

"I say! . . ." Misha drawled. "How is it I've not heard anything about it? How do you know all this, Slava?"

"A chap from the music school told me."

"Why didn't you find out exactly? What they're called, where their club is, and who can join...."

"Join!" Shura laughed. "Think it's so simple to join. I can just see them taking you!"

"Why shouldn't they take me?"

"It's not as easy as that!" Shura said, shaking his head meaningly. "You have to prove your worth first."

"What d'you mean, prove your worth?"

"Well... er, generally speaking," Shura said with an indefinite gesture. "Like other chaps, for example: doing something useful in the club, going to Komsomol meetings."

"All right, Shura," Misha interrupted him. "You needn't brag so much. You swagger a lot, but how much use are you?"

"What are you driving at?"

"I'll tell you. You want to join the Komsomol, don't you? All right. Komsomol members fought at the front. Now they're working at the factories and workshops. And what do you do? You're just one of the crowd at the back of the stage. Tell me, would you like to be stage manager?"

"How can I be stage manager? Our stage manager's Comrade Mitya Sakharov."

"He's stage manager of the adult dramatic circle, but we'll organize one for the children. Then they'll let all of us join the club. We'll put a play on and send the money to help the people starving in the Volga region. That'll be showing what stuff we're made of."

"That's right," Slava said. "And we can organize a music circle, and a choir, and a drawing circle."

"They won't let you," Shura shook his head doubtfully. But the boys could see that he was eager to be their stage manager.

"They will," Misha insisted. "Let's go and see Comrade Mitya Sakharov and tell him about it. How can he prevent us?"

"He'll kick you out!" Borka shouted from the garbage bin where he was rummaging for empty bottles.

"You keep your nose out of this!" Genka said showing his fist. "Go and sell your toffees."

"Well, it's a good idea," Shura continued reflectively. "But my forte's acting and not stage managing."

"Couldn't be better," Misha said. "If you're an actor you'll act the role of stage manager. Don't waste time thinking!"

"All right," Shura finally agreed. "Only promise you'll obey me in everything. Discipline's most important in art. Genka, you'll play the funny roles, and Slava can be the hero and, of course, see to the music. I suggest we appoint Misha our manager." Shura looked at the other children. "I'll distribute the other roles later, after a test."

## **Chapter 20**

### **THE CLUB**

The club premises consisted of a hall and a stage and when there was no performance or tenants' meeting, the benches were moved to one side to make room for other activities.

Housewives and domestic workers studied in a literacy class. The dramatic circle rehearsed on the stage. Billiards enthusiasts played in the middle of the hall, and whenever the string orchestra practised, the billiard players knocked their cues against the musicians. All these activities were presided over by the club manager, Comrade Mitya Sakharov, who was also the stage manager. He was a young man with a long thin nose; his Adam's apple was so sharp that it seemed about to cut through his throat, and his face always had a preoccupied look. He usually wore a long velvet jacket so old that it had turned brown, a shining black bow, and narrow trousers. Mitya's hair was long, straight and of an indefinite colour, and he was constantly smoothing it off his face with the palm of his hand.

Shura pushed Misha forward when the boys entered the club.

"You do the talking. You're the manager," he said and moved aside with

an air as though all this had nothing to do with him and, as far as he was concerned, was just some childish undertaking.

"Hm! . . ." said Mitya Sakharov thoughtfully, after hearing Misha out. "Hm.... All I can say is that I'm not running a theatrical school. This is a cultural establishment. Hm ... a cultural establishment under the firm rule of the house committee...." And he walked to the stage from where, very soon, his tearful voice could be heard pleading: "Comrade Parashina, try to understand your role; be the person you're acting."

"No go," Misha said, returning to his friends. "He's turned us down. He's not running a theatrical school but a cultural establishment under the firm rule of the house committee."

"There, you see," Shura said, "I told you so."

"Oh you and your eternal 'I told you so'," Misha said angrily.

The boys stood thinking for a while. The balls on the billiard table clicked with a hollow sound; the string orchestra was rehearsing Mozart's *Turkish March*; and a poster on the wall showed an emaciated old man stretching out a skinny hand: "Help the starving in the Volga country!" The old man's eyes were feverish and followed you relentlessly no matter from which side you approached the poster.

"There's another way out," Misha said.

"What way?"

"To go and see Comrade Zhurbin."

"Nonsense," said Shura with a hopeless gesture. "He's a member of the City Soviet. It's not likely he'll bother himself about our circle. I'm not going to him. Might run into the old witch, too."

"Then I'll go," Misha insisted. "The club doesn't belong to Mitya Sakharov, after all. Come on, Genka!"

They ran up the broad staircase to the fourth floor where Zhurbin lived. Misha rang the bell. Genka stood on the stairs in a blue funk and as soon as they heard steps the other side of the door, he fled down the steps three at a time. The door was opened by Zhurbin's neighbour, a tall, thin, cross-looking woman with long protruding teeth. The boys called her an old witch because of her sharp temper.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I want to see Comrade Zhurbin."

"What for?"

"On business."

"What business can *you* have! Loafing about here..." she mumbled and slammed the door, almost on Misha's nose.

"Old witch!" he shouted and ran down the stairs.

He had almost reached the bottom when he suddenly bumped into someone. He looked up, and there stood Comrade Zhurbin.

"What's this? Why are you behaving like a ruffian?" Zhurbin asked sternly.

Misha lowered his head.

"Well?" Zhurbin questioned. "Are you deaf?"

"N-no."



"Then why don't you answer me? Don't do it again!" he said, and began climbing the stairs slowly and heavily.

Misha walked away sadly. It had all turned out so badly! He heard Zhurbin's heavy steps above him, heard the key turn in the lock and the door open. Misha stopped.

"Comrade Zhurbin, could I see you for a minute?" he cried, running upstairs again.

Zhurbin stood at the open door and looked inquiringly at Misha.

"What is it?"

"Comrade Zhurbin," Misha puffed, "we want to organize a dramatic circle." He caught his breath, and continued, "We want to, but Comrade Mitya Sakharov won't let us."

"Who is 'we'?"

"All of us. The kids in the court-yard."

Zhurbin's stern look relaxed. A smile hovered round the tips of his moustache and shone in his eyes. But he did not reply, just stood there and smiled into Misha's blue eyes, at his black tangled hair and sharp scratched elbows. Misha wondered why this middle-aged, heavily-built man with the military Order of the Red Banner pinned to his chest was smiling and what he was thinking about.

"Oh well, come in and we'll have a talk," Zhurbin finally said and walked into the flat.

Misha followed him. Zhurbin's "witch" neighbour looked angrily at him but said nothing.

## Chapter 21

### ACROBATS

Misha left Zhurbin's flat half an hour later and went to join his friends in the court-yard. A large crowd was watching a performance by some acrobats. Misha wriggled to the front.

A boy and a girl were giving a turn. They wore blue tights and had red sashes round their waists, and were performing on a rug, while a clean-shaven man also in blue tights was encouraging them with cries of *Allez*.

They were doing incredible things. Especially the girl, a thin, slender little thing with blue eyes under curling lashes. She bowed gracefully, then, carelessly throwing back her long flaxen hair, and chasing, as it were, a habitual smile from her face, made a running somersault.

Near by stood a small donkey harnessed to a cart on two bicycle wheels. On the cart were two plywood boards fixed at an angle, bearing the following inscription in bold letters:

*Bush Brother & Sister*  
Acrobatic Turn

### *Bush Brother & Sister*

The donkey was quite docile. It simply rolled its big eyes round as it looked at the people, and twitched its long ears in a funny way.



When the show ended, the clean-shaven man announced that they were not beggars but actors, and that "circumstances" had forced them to perform in court-yards. He invited the "esteemed public" to show their appreciation of the performance by giving as much as they could afford.

The boy and girl went among the spectators with aluminium plates. Those who had watched the performance from their windows, threw down coins wrapped in paper. The children picked up the money and handed it to the acrobats. Misha, too, picked up a piece of paper with a coin in it and waited for the girl to come up to him.

She came up finally and stopped in front of him, and the smile from her big blue eyes so embarrassed him that he was powerless to move.

"Well?" the girl said, lightly nudging him in the chest with her plate.

That brought Misha back to his senses and he dropped the paper into the plate. The girl moved on, then turned round to look at Misha and laughed. And later when, surrounded by the crowd, the acrobats were leaving the court-yard, the girl turned and smiled at him again.

A slap on his back made Misha turn round. Near him were Shura, Genka, and Slava.

"What did Zhurbin say?" Shura asked.

"Here, read this!" Misha opened his fist and unfolded a piece of paper.

What was this? In the crumpled paper with slanting lines and oil spots there was a ten-kopek piece. Why, of course! He had given Zhurbin's note to the girl by mistake.

"He gave you the sum total of ten kopeks," Shura drawled derisively.

Misha tore out through the gates and raced to the neighbouring court-yard.

The acrobats were already finishing their performance. When the girl started going round with the plate, Misha went to her and put the ten kopeks in her plate.

"Listen, I gave you the wrong paper by mistake," he mumbled in confusion. "Please give it back to me. It's a very important note."

The girl answered him with a merry peal of laughter.

"What note? How funny you are. And why have you got a scar on your forehead?"

"That's no concern of yours," Misha replied dryly. "The White-guards made it. Give me back my note."

"You probably like to fight," the girl said, admonishing him with her finger. "I don't like boys who fight."

"I don't care," Misha said gloomily. "Give me back my note."

"You *are* funny!" the girl shrugged her shoulders. "I never saw your note. Perhaps Bush has it. Wait a minute."

When she finished the round she gave the money she had collected to the man and said something to him. He waved her aside irritably, but the girl insisted, even stamped her foot in its tiny satin shoe. The man put his hand into a canvas bag, frowned and grumbled as he searched in it and finally pulled out the folded piece of paper that Zhurbin had given Misha. Misha snatched it away and ran back to his own court-yard. The girl followed him with her eyes and laughed, and it seemed to Misha that the donkey too shook its head and bared its long yellow teeth to jeer at him.

## Chapter 23

### THE "ART" CINEMA

The boys read Zhurbin's pencilled note, their heads pressed closely together.

"Comrade Sakharov,

The initiative shown by the children must be supported. Work among them is important, especially for the club. Please *be sure to help* the children of our house to organize a dramatic circle.

*Zhurbin"*

"That puts everything right," Shura said. "I knew Zhurbin would help. We'll call an inaugural meeting for to-morrow. Till then, good-bye," he looked at the boys meaningly, "I'm in a hurry. Have an important conference to attend to."

"What a swanker he is!" Genka said when Shura had gone. "I can just see them waiting for him at an important conference. What he needs is a hiding to knock the swagger out of him!"

Misha, Genka, and Slava were sitting on the stone steps at the exit of the

"Art" Cinema. The evening had plunged everything into a grey mist; only the iron roof of the fire emergency tank stood out black in the middle of the court-yard. A guitar was being strummed somewhere and women laughed gaily. Arbat Street throbbed with the last, hurried, fading sounds of evening.

"You know what, chaps?" Genka said. "We can go to the cinema free."

"We know," Misha replied, "but you have to carry posters round all day for that. An interesting amusement, indeed!"

"Well, if we had a cart like the acrobats," Genka smacked his lips, "we could use it to carry the posters. That'd be tip-top!"

"That's right," Misha broke in, "and we could use you for the donkey."

"Can't do that," Slava interjected seriously. "Whoever saw a redheaded donkey?"

"All right, laugh," Genka said, "but Borka'll get the job and a free pass to the cinema."

"He won't apply," Misha pointed out. "He's too busy speculating in stamps now. I'd like to know where he gets them from."

"I know," Genka said. "On the Ostozhenka. From an old stamp dealer."

"Really?" Misha said in surprise. "All the times I've been there I've never seen him."

"You never will. He goes in by the back-door."

"He does, does he?" Misha said wondering. "You mean he's stealing the stamps? He's selling them dirt cheap, you know."

"I don't know about that," Genka drawled. "I only know that he *does* go there. I saw him myself."

"Oh, bother him," Misha said. "Now listen: do you know what Zhurbin told me?"

"How should we! You never told us," Slava said with a shrug.

"Listen then. He told me about those kids in Krasnaya Presnya. They're called Young Pioneers, That's what they're called."

"And what do they do?" Genka asked.

"What do you mean? It's a children's communist organization. See? Com-mu-nist. That means they're Communists... only... well, they're kids. But what kids!"

After a pause, Misha continued:

"Zhurbin said, 'Go on with your circle, visit the club and before you know it you'll be Young Pioneers.' "

"He said that?"

"That's what he said."

"Did he tell you where this organization is?" Slava asked.

"At the print-shop in Krasnaya Presnya. See, I've got everything pat. Not like you."

"It'd be a good idea to go there and have a look!" Slava said, ignoring Misha's remark.

"Yes, that'd be a good idea," Misha agreed. "Only we've got to get the address of the print-shop."

The boys fell silent. Through the door of the cinema, left open to let the air in, the boys saw the black rows of spectators with the bright ray of the

projector over their heads.

Slava's mother, a beautiful, elegantly dressed woman, passed by, and Slava rose as soon as he saw her.

"Slava," she said, pulling on her fine black gloves, "it's time you went home."

"I'll go soon."

"Don't stay out too long. Dasha will give you your supper and then you must go to bed."

She moved on, leaving behind a trail of delicate perfume.

"Mother's gone to a concert," Slava said. "You know what? Let's go to the cinema! They're showing the second part of *Little Red Devils*."

"What about money?"

Slava hesitated.

"Mother gave me two roubles. I did want to buy some music with it."

"Why didn't you tell us before?" cried Genka, springing up. "Come on. You can't buy music to-day. All the shops are closed already."

"But I could buy it to-morrow," Slava argued.

"To-morrow? Let to-morrow take care of itself. And, anyway, you should never put things off till to-morrow. If we can go to the cinema to-day, we should go."

The boys bought the tickets and went in.

A narrow passage led from the entrance to a small lobby. On its walls old placards alternated with portraits of famous film stars and yellowed announcements. A Red Army soldier in a cavalry army cap, holding a rifle in his hand, looked down from one of the posters, which bore the inscription:

"We have volunteered. What about you? Sign below."

Another poster, with the words "Help to combat juvenile delinquency," hung against the wall behind the buffet with its sweets and stale pastries.

The crowd was a motley one. Demobilized army men in caps and great-coats. Women workers in kerchiefs. Young men in Russian blouses, jackets, and trousers tucked into high boots.

The bell rang and the spectators scrambled into the hall for the best seats. The lights went out; the projector began its furious clatter; a monotonous tune came from the broken-down piano; the spectators huddled close together on the narrow benches, whispering and eating sunflower seeds.

The film ended and the boys found themselves in the street again, but their thoughts were still there, in the cinema with the *Little Red Devils* and their amazing adventures. The boys' admiration for the Young Communists in the film knew no bounds. What a pity he had been small when he was in Revsk, Misha thought. He would know now how to deal with Nikitsky....

So ended the first day of the holidays. Now it was time to go home. It was already quite dark. Only the lamps at the entrance to the "Art" Cinema threw a big patch of light on the pavement. The photographs had grown dim behind the wire netting of the bill-boards and torn strips of posters fluttered against the doors.

## Chapter 23

### THE DRAMATIC CIRCLE

When Misha went down to the court-yard on the following morning he noticed Uncle Vasili, the janitor, coming out of the back entrance carrying a hammer and nails.

Misha walked up to the entrance and saw that the opening leading to the cellars had been boarded up with thick planks. "Well, I'm blowed," he thought.

He went back to where Uncle Vasili was washing down the courtyard with-a thick canvas hose.

"Uncle Vasili, let me do it for you," Misha offered. "Get along with you!" The janitor apparently was in a bad humour. "Too many of you volunteers for this job! You only want to muck about."

Misha looked closely at the janitor.

"Uncle Vasili, have you started doing carpentry?" he asked cautiously.

Uncle Vasili gave the hose an angry shake, sending a stream of water on the windows of the second floor.

"Filin's worrying about his store, so I'm to board it up. Stuck to me like a leech. Thieves might get into the basement, he says, so I'm to board it up. There's nothing in the store but scrap iron, nothing at all; but all the same, I'm to board it up. Nonsense, I call it!"

So that was it! Filin was at the bottom of the business. There was something in the wind after all. And Borka must have had a reason for not letting him into the cellars yesterday. It was certainly not just for nothing!

Borka was hawking cigarettes at the entrance gates. "Let's go down into the cellars," Misha suggested, going up to him. "Nothing doing!" Borka sneered. "They've boarded up the entrance."

"On whose orders?" Borka sniffed.

"Whose? Everybody knows: the house-manager's." "Why'd he order it?"

"Why? What for?" Borka mimicked. "So that the corpses wouldn't run away. That's why. And so that characters like you wouldn't nose around in the cellars!" he added, taking to his heels.

Misha followed in hot pursuit, but Borka took shelter in his father's storehouse. Misha shook his fist at him and went to the club.

Zhurbin's note worked. Mitya Sakharov allotted the children a space in the club but warned them that he would not give them a single kopek.

"Solvency is the main principle of the theatre," he said. "Learn to work without financial assistance." He said many other strange words the children did not understand.

Shura Bolshoi gave a test to everyone who wished to join; he got them to recite Pushkin's *Prophet*. The way they recited did not satisfy him and he showed them how it should be done. When he came to the words "And tore out my sinful tongue," he made a face and desperately motioned with his

hands as though he were really tearing out his tongue and throwing it down the stairs. His efforts were so convincing that afterwards little Vovka Baranov, nicknamed Whiner, kept looking into his mouth to see if his tongue was still there.

After the tests they began to choose a play.

"*Pavel Ivanov*" Slava suggested.

"Everyone's fed up with it!" said Shura with a flourish of his hand. "It's a hackneyed bourgeois play." And he recited:

*Kir, the mighty Persian king,  
Ripped his trousers hurrying.*

"We know all about that king! No, it won't do," he added in a tone that brooked no objection.

After a long argument they finally settled on a play in verse, *The Kulak and the Labourer*, about a boy named Vanya who worked for Pakhom the kulak.

Shura took the part of the kulak, Genka—the boy Vanya, and the role of Vanya's grandmother was given to Zina Kruglova, a fat girl, full of giggles, who lived in the first block.

Misha took no part in the tests. He sat at a chess table with his chin in his hands and thought about the cellars.

Borka Filin had cheated him, cheated him deliberately. He had told his father, and Filin had ordered the entrance to be blocked. That meant there was some kind of connection between the cellars and the storehouse, although the latter was in the neighbouring court-yard.

What threat hung over the storehouse with its rusty, useless machinery and spare parts? Junk like that was scattered all over the court-yard and nobody bothered about it. Who wanted it? Who would climb down there, especially into the cellars where one had to crawl on all fours?

And this Filin. Perhaps he really was the man Polevoy had told him about. Misha recalled his narrow face, flattened in at the sides, and his small, peering eyes. One winter Filin had come to their flat and given Mother a tiny sack of coarse flour in exchange for Father's dark-blue suit and waistcoat that he had hardly worn. Filin had looked round for something else, his small eyes darting about the room. When Mother had said she regretted parting with the suit as it was the last thing she had to remember Father by, Filin had replied:

"Are you going to eat this souvenir with butter? I hope you like it."

Mother had sighed, but said nothing.

Misha felt he simply had to get to the bottom of all this. He could not let Borka off so easily.

He got up and swept his eyes round the club-room, wondering if there was a way of getting into the cellars from it. Actually the club was in the basement, true, in another part of the building, but that was not important: there should be some passage connecting the club with the rest of the building.

Misha walked round the room, carefully studying the walls. He pulled off posters and diagrams, got behind cupboards, but found nothing. He went behind the stage. The floor here was cluttered up with all sorts of lumber. In the dim light he saw decorations standing against the wall: plywood birch-trees with black-and-white trunks, cottages with fretted windows; rooms with clocks and a view on a river.

He was moving these decorations, trying to get closer to the wall, when suddenly Comrade Mitya Sakharov appeared from behind the curtains.

"Misha Polyakov! What *are* you doing here?"

"I lost ten kopeks, Comrade Sakharov, and I can't find it anywhere."

"What ten kopeks?"

"Ten kopeks, you understand, a coin," Misha mumbled keeping his eyes fastened to one spot. Behind a board with a painting of a white-columned landlord's mansion there was an iron door.

"You know, a silver twenty-kopek piece."

"Hm. What's this nonsense? A ten-kopek piece, then a twenty-kopek piece.... Are you out of your mind?"

"Oh, no," Misha said, his eyes still on the door. "I had a ten-kopek piece, but I lost a twenty-kopek piece. What's wrong with that?"

"Plenty," Mitya Sakharov said, shrugging his shoulders. "Oh yes, plenty. Anyhow, find your ten-kopek-twenty-kopek piece quickly and get out."

He smoothed his hair back with the palm of his hand and walked away.

## Chapter 24

### THE CELLARS

Misha, Genka, and Slava were on the bank of the Moscow River near the newly built aquatic station hard by the Dorogomilovsky Bridge.

Slava lay on his back and looked dreamily at the sky. Genka was shying pebbles into the river and counting the number of times they jumped on the surface. Misha was trying to persuade his friends to go with him in search of the passage to the cellars.

Daylight was fading. Wisps of thin mist skimmed the surface of the water like poorly inflated grey balls, touching it and gently rebounding into the air. Tram-cars were clattering over the bridge, pedestrians hurried over and cars sped by; they looked tiny from where the boys were sitting.

"Just think of it—corpses and coffins!" Misha was saying. "It's all fairy-tales. As though Filin would bother about corpses! All that's been cooked up to keep us out. Cooked up on purpose. Either there's an underground passage, or they're hiding something."

"Don't argue, Misha," Genka sighed, "there are corpses that can't rest in peace. There's always the chance they'll attack you if you go into the cellars."

"There aren't any corpses there, of course," Slava said, "but why should all



this concern us? Suppose Filin is hiding something there: everybody knows he's a speculator. What business is it of ours?"

"But if there really is an underground passage leading out to all parts of Moscow, what then?"

"We shan't find it anyway," Slava objected. "We've got no plan."

"All right," Misha said, standing up. "All I can say is you're cowards. And you want to be Young Pioneers! Pity I told you about it. Never mind, I'll get along without you."

"I haven't refused to go, have I?" Genka said, shaking his head. "I only mentioned the corpses. You're so touchy. It's Slava who doesn't want to go. I'll go any time you like."

"When did I say I wouldn't go?" said Slava flushing. "I only said it'd be better if we had a plan. Didn't I?"

The friends arrived for the next rehearsal earlier than the others.

Rehearsals of the juvenile dramatic circle were usually held from two to four o'clock in the afternoon. After that Aunt Elizaveta, the cleaner, locked up the club till five when the adults arrived. The boys wanted to use the period between four and five o'clock to get ink) the cellars.

Misha and Slava hid at the back of the stage. Genka waited for the other actors. Soon they appeared and began rehearsing; Misha and Slava could hear everything they said.

Shura, playing the kulak, was persuading Genka, in the role of Vanya.

"Vanya, I christened you," he declaimed, to which Genka-Vanya haughtily replied:

"I didn't ask you to."

And then they argued about how Genka should stand on the stage: with his face to the audience and his back to Shura, or with his face to Shura and his back to the audience. They argued more than they rehearsed. Shura shouted at everyone, and threatened to wash his hands of the whole thing. Genka wrangled with him. Zina Kruglova could not stop giggling and kept tittering all the time.

The rehearsal finally ended. Genka unnoticeably joined his friends and the other boys and girls left; Aunt Elizaveta closed the club. The boys were now alone in front of the heavy iron door that led into the cellars.

They pulled out a nail with a pair of pincers they had brought with them, and pushed the door; it squeaked on its rusty hinges and opened slowly.

A stream of damp air rose from the passage. Misha switched on a small torch and they went in.

The battery in the torch was weak and to see the grey, irregular wall, they had to keep close to it.

The cellars in which they found themselves consisted of several square sections, formed by the foundation of the building. These were empty, except that one of them contained two big boilers. This was an abandoned boiler-room. The floor was strewn with bits of piping, hardened lime, bricks, coal, and wooden boxes with dried cement.

The torch was getting weaker and weaker... and finally went out. The boys moved on in the darkness, feeling for the turns with their hands. At times

they thought they were circling about one spot, but Misha doggedly pushed ahead, and Slava and Genka did their best to keep up.

A strip of light showed through a narrow opening. They had reached the boarded-up door and the light was filtering through the slits between the boards. Leading up to the door was a narrow staircase with steep steps and iron hand-rails.

The boys went farther into the cellars, keeping to the right as before. The passage narrowed more and more. Misha felt the ceiling and found the iron pipe. He stopped to listen: water was gurgling quietly above him.

He squatted on his heels and lit a match. A narrow passage stretched below, the same one into which he had fallen when he had come with Borka. The boys crawled along this passage and when they reached the end of it Misha put his hand up to feel for the ceiling. It was out of reach and he lit another match.

The boys saw they were in a big square space with a low ceiling.

"Look," whispered Genka, "coffins."

The dark outlines of big "coffins" loomed against the opposite wall.

The boys came to a dead stop. The match went out. In the darkness they thought they heard strange rustlings and muffled graveyard voices. The boys stood rooted to the ground. Suddenly there was a creaking sound overhead, a beam of light showed and widened and they heard the shuffling of feet. They fled back to the passage and hid there, hardly daring to breathe.

A trap-door opened in the ceiling and someone lowered a ladder. Two men climbed down carefully. A third handed down some boxes; these were placed alongside the pile of other boxes, which the boys in their fright had taken for coffins.

Then a third man lowered himself into the space. As he stepped off the ladder he tripped and swore. Misha started. He thought the voice sounded familiar.



This man was tall. He went round the room, examined the boxes and

sniffed.

"Who's been striking matches here?" he asked.

The boys' hearts sank.

"You're imagining things, Sergei Ivanovich," one of the other men said.

The boys recognized Filin's voice.

"I never imagine anything, get that into your head, Filin."

The tall man approached the passage and stood quite close to the boys. But he had his back to them and they could not see his face.

"Did you have the passage blocked?" he asked.

"Exactly as you ordered," Filin replied promptly. "The door's been boarded up and the passage blocked."

That was a lie: the passage had not been blocked at all.

Then all three climbed back through the trap-door, pulling the ladder after them. The trap-door was closed and the room again plunged in darkness. The friends quickly crawled back and made their way into the club. It was already open and they rushed out into the street.



## Chapter 25

### SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS

A short summer shower was just over, leaving a sparkle on the cobblestones, the shop windows, and the black silk umbrellas. Muddy streams were running into the drains from the gutters. Girls were laughing merrily as they splashed through the puddles, carrying their shoes in their hands. Some builders went by with sacks on their heads like hoods. Water was spurting from a burst drain-pipe, splashing passers-by, making them jump aside in fright. And above all this the cheerful sun shone in the sky, chasing away the ragged, heavy clouds.

"What did you get the wind up for, Genka?" Misha asked. "You go round

seeing coffins everywhere!"

"You mean to tell me *you* weren't frightened?" Genka retorted. "You were pretty scared yourself, and now you're picking on me!"

He paused for a minute, then said:

"I know what's in those boxes."

"What?"

"Thread. That's what."

"How d'you know?"

"I know. All the speculators are now dealing in thread. They say it pays best."

But Misha's ears still rang with the sound of the strangely familiar voice. Who could it have been? They called him Sergei Ivanovich. Polevoy was also called that, but this man was not Polevoy. It was just that their names coincided.

The boys were standing near the "Art" Cinema. Misha had his eye on the door of the storehouse. Genka and Slava were looking at the stills on the bill-board. "Famine... famine... famine." It was a film about the famine on the Volga.

Yura Stotsky, the son of Doctor "Ear, Nose, and Throat," passed them. He had been a boy scout, but now there were no scouts and Yura did not wear the uniform; but all the boys still called him Yura the Scout. He was with two friends and was carrying a stave with a flag tied to the end of it.

"Hey, you! Scouts!" Genka bullied them. "Hand that stick over!"

He pulled at the flag and Yura and his friends tugged at the other end of the stave. Genka was alone against three of them. He looked round for his friends: why weren't they helping him? But Slava did not interfere and Misha said curtly: "Cut it out" and continued to watch Filin's storehouse.

What did Misha mean: "cut it out"? Let the scouts get the better of him? These bourgeois fawners? They were supporting some general. Well, he would show them a general! He kicked out at his opponents and tugged with all his might.

"Cut it out, I tell you!" Misha said angrily.

Genka let go the stave.

"All right, I'll show you yet," he said puffing.

"Go on, show us!" Yura sneered arrogantly. "We're not afraid of you."

Yura marched off with his friends. Genka looked at Misha in surprise, but the latter ignored both Genka and Yura. A tall, thin man came out of the storehouse; he was wearing top boots and a white Caucasian shirt, complete with a black silver-ornamented belt. The man stopped at the gates to light a cigarette, bringing the match up and shielding the flame with his palms. His palms hid his face, and through his fingers he surveyed the street, after which he threw away the match and went in the direction of Arbat Square. Misha followed him, but in crossing the street the man unexpectedly boarded a passing tram-car and vanished.

Misha wandered about the streets, a vague alarm clutching his heart.

The flaming sunset lit fires on the domes of the churches. The hot summer breeze carried the smell of the melted asphalt pavements and of the dust of

the cobble-stone roads. Carefree children played in the green boulevards and old women sat on the benches.

Why was this man's voice so strangely familiar? Where had he heard it? What was Filin hiding in the cellar? Perhaps there was nothing in it all. He was simply using the cellar as a store-room. Of course he could have imagined that the voice was familiar. But what if... No, that could not be! Was it possible that the stranger was Nikitsky? No! He did not look like him. Where was the scar and the forelock? No, he was not Nikitsky. And he was called Sergei Ivanovich. If he were Nikitsky would he have dared to walk about Moscow so openly?

Misha passed the Vozdvizhenka and came out on the Mokhovaya..

Book dealers had their stalls against the university railings. Elderly men, thin and stoop-shouldered, wearing glasses and battered hats were standing on the pavement absorbed in their reading. Students of the workers' faculty in Russian blouses and leather jackets carrying shabby brief-cases under their arms were streaming out of the university.

A column of demonstrators blocked Misha's way at the corner of the street. They were workers from the Krasnaya Presnya district,, bearing banners that stretched across the entire width of the street: "Down with the Hirelings of the Entente!" "Down with the Agents of International Imperialism!" The demonstrators were moving to the House of Trade Unions, where some Social-Revolutionaries ( [Social-Revolutionaries were a petty-bourgeois party that degenerated into a gang of assassins, spies, and saboteurs working against the young Soviet land.—Ed.](#)) were being tried in the Hall of Columns.

Other columns of demonstrators were marching from the Lubyanskaya and the Red squares. These were workers from the Sokolniki and Zamoskvorechye districts from the "Guzhon," "Bromley" and "Mikhelson" ( ["Guzhon," "Bromley," and "Mikhelson" were factories named after their former owners.—Ed.](#)) factories. Young Communists were engaged in excited conversation. Orators addressed the crowds. They said the British and American capitalists wanted to strangle the Soviet Republic with the help of social-revolutionary traitors. They had failed in open battle; the intervention had been crushed; and now they were conspiring among themselves and sending spies and saboteurs into our country.

Maybe Nikitsky had not escaped abroad, thought Misha. He might be hiding somewhere and organizing a plot, just like the men who were now facing trial. He was a Whiteguard, an enemy of the Soviets.... What if that tall stranger was Nikitsky, and Filin was the man Polevoy had told him about? In that case Nikitsky was using Film's house as a hide-out; he was in disguise and had changed his name... Perhaps they were using the cellar to hide weapons for their Whiteguard band. It all looked very suspicious indeed.

Polevoy had warned him to be careful. But that was a long time ago. He had been small then. And now. Ought he to wait for Polevoy? What if a plot was really being organized and the men had weapons? No, he could not wait any longer....

At the entrance to the House of Trade Unions two Red Army soldiers were checking the passes of the people going in. Misha tried to slip through, but a strong hand stopped him.

"Where d'you think you're going? Show your pass!" Misha walked away glowering at the guards. All they did was to stand there all day. They little knew that he, Misha, might soon uncover a fearful plot.

## Chapter 26

### THE AERIAL RUNWAY

The low brick premises of Filin's storehouse with their broad gates and boarded windows stretched along the length of the neighbouring court-yard, which was littered with old machine parts and scrap metal.

Misha now spent much of his time near or around the storehouse. Once he had even entered it, but Filin had chased him away. So he began to keep an eye on the door from a distance. For days on end he watched from the cinema entrance, from the workmen's dining-room with the green and yellow sign-board, and from the bread shop, but the tall stranger in the white Caucasian shirt never appeared again. One day Misha wanted to go down into the cellars beneath Filin's storehouse, but the passage-way was blocked.

Meanwhile, rehearsals were finishing. The day for the performance drew nearer, and Shura began to pester Misha to buy the make-up.

"You're the manager," he said, "it's your job to see that we get the make-up. We'll manage about the scenery, but we've got to have paints for the make-up. That's not all. We also need wigs. You're the manager. It's your job. I can't see to everything, and I don't have to tell you that acting and directing is enough to keep anyone busy."

Mitya Sakharov had refused to provide any money, so Misha decided to organize a lottery, and for the prize he sacrificed his volume of Gogol's *Collected Works*. Although parting with Gogol made his heart ache, there was nothing else he could do. He could not ruin the show, could he? And then Shura Bolshoi always said that "art demands sacrifices."

One hundred lottery tickets at thirty kopeks each were quickly sold out. Only Borka refused to buy one, and did everything he could to spoil the lottery. He told everyone that Misha's ticket would be sure to win the prize and that all the money would also go to him. He was so determined to discredit the lottery that even the beatings Misha and Genka gave him proved unavailing.

Borka's latest friend was Yura, the Scout, who now joined in the games in the court-yard. One day Borka and Yura built an aerial runway as a counter-attraction to the dramatic circle.

The aerial runway consisted of a metal cable, stretched across the back-yard, one end fastened to a fire escape near the second floor of one of the buildings, and the other to a tree, about four yards above the ground; the

cable had rollers fixed to it, and from these dangled a rope with its loose end tied in a loop. The "passenger" sat in the loop and, with a helping push from the higher end at the fire escape, glided swiftly over the yard. A long rope was used to pull the loop back to the fire escape. Borka took the first ride, then Yura, and after him several other boys.

The aerial runway attracted general attention; boys came from the neighbouring court-yards to look at it. Inquisitive tenants watched the proceedings from their windows, while Uncle Vasili, the janitor, stood a long time leaning on his broom and then went away with a muttered "More mischief, I call it!"

Suddenly Borka stopped the aerial runway and, after a whispered consultation with Yura, announced that there would be no more free rides. Anyone wanting to ride now had to pay five kopeks a turn.

"And anyone who's hard up," he added, "can return his lottery ticket to Misha and get his money back. What's the lottery to you anyway? You won't win anything."

Yegorka, the pigeon-fancier, was the first to approach Misha, and he was followed by blobber-lipped Vaska. They held out their tickets and asked for their money back. At this point Genka interfered, stepping between them and Misha.

"I'm sorry, citizens," he announced sweetly, mimicking the shop-assistant at the baker's, "it's against regulations to take anything back. Count your change before leaving the cash desk."

That raised a terrific hubbub. Borka shouted that this was downright robbery and swindling. Yegorka and Vaska demanded their money. Yura stood in the background, smirking maliciously.

Misha pushed Genka aside, looked calmly round at the shouting boys and took the lottery money from his pocket. There was immediate silence. He counted the money, exactly thirty roubles, then placed it on a back-door step and weighed it down with a stone to prevent the wind from blowing it away, and turned and faced the boys.

"I don't want your money," he said. "You can take it back. Only use your heads a bit and think why Yura and Borka want to spoil our show. Yura used to go to the boy scouts' club and you know that the scouts are for the bourgeois, and they don't want us to have our own club. As for Borka, he's not worth talking about. There! Now let those who have no conscience take their money back themselves and put their tickets on the step."

After this long speech Misha walked to a rusty radiator lying in the yard and sat down with his back to the boys.

But no one went for his money. The boys shifted from one foot to the other in embarrassment, each of them pretending he had never had any intention of returning his ticket.

In the meantime Genka had climbed the fire escape and was untying the runway.

"Get off there," Borka shouted. "Don't you dare touch it!"

But the cable and loop were already on the ground.

Genka jumped off the fire escape and went up to Borka.



"What are you getting all excited for? D'you think we don't know anything? We know everything. About the cellars and the boxes. Push off!"

Borka gave the boys and girls a sullen look, picked up the cable, rolled it up, and went away without saying a word.

## Chapter 27

### THE SECRET

"What d'you mean by it, you bungler!" Misha railed Genka. "Who asked you to blurt everything out?"

"You want me to tolerate his cheek, is that your idea?" Genka said in self-defence. "I've got to keep my mouth shut and let him spoil the show, is that it?"

The friends were at Slava's. He lived in a large, bright flat. The floor was carpeted, a beautiful lamp-shade hung over the table, and gaily coloured cushions lay on the sofa.

Genka was sitting on the revolving piano-stool in front of the piano and looking at the covers of the music scores. He knew he was in the wrong and kept up an unnaturally animated chatter to hide his discomfiture.

"Paganini," he read. "Who's this Paganini?"

"He was a famous violinist," Slava explained. "On one occasion his enemies snapped the strings of his violin before a concert, but he played on one string and no one noticed the difference."

"What's great in that? Father had a fireman called Panfilov on his engine who could play anything you want on bottles. I'd like to see your Paganini play on bottles!"

"What's the use of talking to you," Slava said irritably. "What do you know about music!"

"Can't I talk?" Genka said, pushing away from the piano and turning on the revolving stool.

"Listen here, Genka," Misha said gloomily, "you've got to think before you open your mouth. If you had done that, you'd never have blurted out about the boxes to Borka."

"Especially when there's nothing in those boxes," Slava added.

"But there is something," Genka objected, "they're full of thread."

"Why are you so sure of that?" Slava asked.

"I'm sure, that's all!" Genka said with a toss of his forelocks.

"You're always babbling about what you don't know," Misha said. "The boxes contain something quite different."

"What?"

"Catch me telling you! Why, you'd blab it out again to the first person you'd meet."

"Word of honour!" Genka said, placing his hand over his heart. "May I die on the spot! May I . . ."

"You can keep on swearing from now till doomsday," Misha interrupted him, "I shan't tell you just the same, because you've always been a blabber and still are."

"But you can tell me, can't you? I didn't blab," Slava said.

"I shan't tell you anything," Misha said angrily. "I see I can't trust you with anything important."

The friends sat in silence, pouting at each other.

"All the same it's mean to hide anything," Slava said finally. "All three of us went into the cellar and therefore we shouldn't have any secrets from each other."

"How could I know there was a secret?" Genka spoke up, appealing to Slava. "I thought the boxes were, well, just ordinary boxes... Misha didn't warn me. He's hiding something and now he's blaming others."

That set Misha thinking. He realized that he was not altogether in the right. He should have warned Genka. And, in general, he had not behaved as a comrade should. He should have confided in his friends. But... then what about the dirk? Should he have told them about the dirk, too? Of course, he could depend on them not to give him away, and Genka would never have blabbed if he had known everything. But should he tell them about the dirk? He could start by telling them about Filin and Nikitsky, and tell them about the dirk another time. But then if they knew about the dirk they could help him... for alone he would be unable to do anything. It's hard to fight a battle single-handed.

"When a chap has a head on his shoulders he should use it," he muttered looking at Genka. "Poor chap, he wasn't 'warned'!"

Genka sensed the conciliatory note in Misha's voice.

"But try to understand my side of it, Misha," he said energetically. "How could I have known? It never entered my head that you were hiding something from us. You know I have no secrets from you."

"And anyway," Slava said in a hurt voice, "if you have secrets from us then there's nothing more to be said."

"All right," Misha said. "I'll tell you, but remember it's a *big* secret. It was entrusted to me not by just anybody. It was told to me by—" he looked at the tense curiosity in the boys' faces and added slowly: "by *Polevoy*. That's who told me the secret!"

Genka's pupils widened, and he fixed his eyes on Misha. Slava, too, was looking at Misha very attentively—he knew about Polevoy and Nikitsky from the stories Misha and Genka had told him.

"So there!" Misha continued. "First give me your word of honour that you will never, no matter what happens, tell anything to anyone."

"I give you my word of honour," Genka announced solemnly, striking his chest with his fist.

"I swear on my honour," Slava said.

Misha got up and tiptoed to the door. He carefully opened it, peeped into the corridor, and tightly shut it again. After that he cautiously glanced about the room and looked under the sofa.

"Anyone in there?" he whispered, pointing to the bedroom door.

"No," Slava whispered back.

"All right, here goes," Misha said in a low voice, casting his eyes about the room mysteriously. "The name of Nikitsky's right-hand man in his gang is—" he paused, then announced significantly: "Filin! There!"

His friends were stunned by the news.

Genka sat tightly gripping the piano-stool, his body bent forward, his mouth wide-open and his eyes as big as saucers. Even his hair stood on end in a peculiar way, sticking out in all directions, as if it, too, had been taken aback by the news. Slava blinked as though sand had been thrown in his eyes.

Misha saw the impression he had made, and to make it stronger, continued:

"And so I suspect that the tall man we saw in the cellar, you remember the one with the Caucasian shirt, is Nikitsky!"

Genka almost fell off his chair. Slava stood up and looked at Misha in bewilderment.

"Are you, are you serious?" he asked, scarcely able to bring out the words.

"Well, I like that," Misha shrugged his shoulders. "Now, would I joke about things like that! It's not a joking matter, chum. I recognized him by his voice. True, I didn't see his face, but I'm sure he's in disguise."

"Well, I'm blowed!" Genka said, when at last he found his voice.

"You can well be blowed, especially with your tongue!"

"In that case," Slava said, "we should immediately notify the militia."

"We can't do that," Misha replied with a mysterious look.

"Why not?"

"We can't," he repeated.

"But why?" Slava wondered.

"First we've got to make sure of everything," Misha replied evasively.

"I don't see what there is to make sure of," Slava shrugged. "Even if you're not sure about Nikitsky, Filin's the one."

The situation was becoming critical. Slava was so full of scruples. Now he would start reasoning, and Misha was still not sure if Filin was really the man or not.

"I've not told you the whole story yet," Misha said, making up his mind to tell his friends about the dirk. "Let's go over to my place."

The friends went to Misha's and as they crossed the court-yard Genka cast a suspicious look around. His imagination was already working furiously, and he half expected Nikitsky to appear any minute.

## Chapter 28

### THE CODE

When they arrived at Misha's the boys silently took their places round the table.

It was already evening, but Misha did not put on the light.

Genka and Slava watched him with bated breath. He latched the door as noiselessly as he could, then drew the curtains, plunging the room into almost complete darkness. After taking all these precautions, he took his package from the book-shelf and placed it on the table.

"See this!" he whispered mysteriously, and opened the package.

Genka and Slava leaned forward and almost lay on the table. The dirk appeared in Misha's hands.

"A dirk," Genka whispered.

But Misha raised a warning finger.

"Quiet!" he said. "Look." And he showed his friends the markings on the blade. "Wolf, scorpion, and lily. See? And now for the most important part."

He unscrewed the handle with a theatrical gesture, drew out the scroll, and smoothed it out on the table.

"A code," Slava whispered with a searching look at Misha.

"Yes," he confirmed, "it's a code, and the key to it is in the sheath, understand? And Nikitsky has the sheath. There. And now listen."

Misha rolled his eyes and gesticulated with his hands as, in a hardly audible voice, he told his friends about the Empress Maria, about her destruction, and about the murder of the officer named Vladimir....

The boys sat like statues, hypnotized by the strange story. The room was already in complete darkness, and there seemed to be no one in the flat, it was so still. Only a muffled gurgle sometimes came from the water-pipe and a homeless cat mewed pitifully on the landing. In the gloom about them the boys thought they saw wondrous ships and distant, desert lands. They felt the coolness of the ocean depths and the touch of sea monsters.

Misha stood up and turned on the light. The small lamp shone brightly under the shade and illumined the excited faces of the boys, the white cloth on the table, and the steel blade of the glittering dirk with the bronze serpent twined round the yellowed handle.

"I wonder what the code's about?" Slava said, breaking the silence first.

"It's difficult to say," Misha shrugged. "Polevoy had no idea, and it's doubtful if Nikitsky knows. He's looking for the dirk, you know, to decipher this scroll. That means it's a secret to him, too. Otherwise why should he be so keen on having it?"

"Why, that's easy to see," Genka joined in. "It's clear Nikitsky's looking for treasure. That's what he's looking for. And the dirk says where that treasure is. I say, there must be a lot of money there!"

"You only find treasure in books," Misha said, "books specially written for idlers, who sit around doing nothing and dream of finding treasure and becoming rich."

"Naturally there can't be any treasure in this," Slava remarked. "Nikitsky killed a man because of the dirk. Would you, Genka, for instance, kill a man for money?"

"W-well," Genka drawled, "a nice comparison you're making! Nikitsky's not me and I'm not Nikitsky. Naturally I wouldn't have killed anyone, but for Nikitsky it's easy as winking. Nikitsky's a bourgeois, after all."

"Maybe there's some military secret in this," Slava said. "It all happened during the war on a battleship."

"I've thought of that already," Misha interrupted him. "Let's suppose Nikitsky's a German spy. Why did he look for the dirk in 1921? The war was already over then."

"All codes can be deciphered without a key," Slava continued. "Edgar Allan Poe has..."

"We know, we know!" Misha stopped him. "*The Gold Bug*, we've read it. But this is different. Look." They bent over the scroll. "See? There are only three kinds of signs here: dots, dashes, and circles. If a sign stands for a letter then there are only three letters. See? These signs are written in tables."

"Maybe each table stands for a letter," Slava reflected.

"I've thought of that, too," Misha replied, "but most of the tables have five signs. Count them! Exactly seventy tables, and forty have five signs each. One letter can't occur forty times out of seventy."

"Why try to solve the code," Genka said, "the thing to do is to find the sheath. Especially as Nikitsky's here."

"Well," Slava objected, "it's still uncertain whether the man is Nikitsky. It's only your supposition, isn't it, Misha?"

"The man's Nikitsky all right," Genka persisted. "Film's here. And he and Nikitsky are from the same gang. I'm right, aren't I, Misha?"

Misha felt a bit awkward.

"As I've told you everything," he said with a resolute toss of his head, "I've got to be quite honest with you. The fact is I still don't know if he's the right Filin or not."

"What d'you mean you don't know," the boys cried out dumbfoundedly.

"What I say. Polevoy only told me the surname, and we've got to find out whether Filin is the man he told me about. There are lots of Filins! But somehow I feel he's the man."

"Indeed," Slava said slowly, "this turns out to be an equation with two unknowns."

"Here, just look at him bringing in mathematics," Genka said, boiling up. "Film's our man, that's definite. You can see he's a bandit by his face."

"By his face—that's no proof," Slava argued. "All right," Misha said. "I agree that we haven't any proof. But let's think it out properly. Now, wait a minute. In the first place his surname's Filin, that coincides. Next, is he a suspicious character? He is, without the slightest doubt. A speculator and all that.... Right. Secondly: are they doing anything shady? They most certainly are. They have a room full of boxes in the cellar and they've boarded up the door and blocked the passage. Thirdly: is the tall man a suspicious character? He is. Did you see how he looked up and down the street and hid his face? Then his voice. I know his voice. Even suppose he's not Nikitsky, it's a fact that some gang *is* operating there. Maybe they're Whiteguards. Or spies. Ought we to sit and do nothing? Eh? Ought we? No. Our duty is to unmask this gang."

"That's right," Genka supported him. "We've got to catch this gang, take

away the sheath and divide the treasure into three equal parts." "Wait a minute with your treasure and don't interrupt!" Misha said angrily. "It's like this. We can, of course, go to the militia, but what if it all turns out to be nothing? Suddenly? What then? We'll look fools. No! First we've got to find out everything. We've got to find out if it's the right Filin, what they're hiding in the cellar, and the main thing is to get on the track of the tall stranger in the white Caucasian shirt and find out who he is."

"That won't be easy," said Slava, but seeing the smirk on Genka's face, he hurriedly added, "We've got to unmask the gang, of course, but we've got to lay our plans carefully."

"Yes, you're right," Misha agreed. "Everything's got to be planned. This is what we'll do. We'll take it in turn to watch so that Filin and Borka won't be suspicious. And when we get on the track of the whole gang, ascertain everything, we can inform the Cheka." (An extraordinary commission that had existed in the first years of Soviet power to fight the enemies of the Soviet state—counter-revolutionaries, spies, and speculators.—*Ed.*)

"That'll be great!" Genka exclaimed joyfully. "We'll catch the whole gang!"

"You bet we will," Misha said, "that's the way gangs are caught. That'll be really showing ourselves—not like shouting from the wings."





### **Part III**

## **NEW FRIENDS**

### **Chapter 29**

## **ELLEN BUSH**

Several days later Misha and Shura Bolshoi went to Smolensky Market to buy the make-up paints. When they passed Film's storehouse they saw Genka in the street "on duty" by the gates.

"What are you hanging around here for?" Shura asked him. "Come with us for the make-up."

"I'm busy," Genka replied importantly, with a knowing glance at Misha.

At the market crowds of people were thronging the space between the stalls. Waifs were dodging in and out of them, gramophones were screeching, and some buyers were bargaining over the price of the watches. Dowdy old women in old-fashioned hats were selling broken locks and brass candlesticks. A perspiring village lad had obviously spent the morning haggling over a concertina; surrounded by music-lovers, he dragged out the same lovesick tune over and over again. Near him a parrot was picking out envelopes, enclosing papers which told fortunes and gave detailed descriptions of the past. Gipsy women in full skirts and bright kerchiefs were looking for people wanting their fortunes told. The market seemed endless to Misha and Shura. It stretched on and on along a path littered with sunflower-seed husks and leading to Novinsky Boulevard, where municipal workmen were placing the first litter bins and enclosing the sickly grass with shining wire.

The boys were looking at the wares of an old man selling "everything for

the theatre," when suddenly someone touched Misha's shoulder. He turned to see the girl acrobat. She was wearing an ordinary dress and did not look like an actress at all.

"Hello, scrapper!" she said, holding out her hand.

Misha did not like her tone.

"Hello," he replied coldly.

"Why are you looking so stern?"

"I'm not. I'm always like that."

"What's your name?"

"Misha."

"And I'm called Ellen."

"You can't call *that* a name."

"It's my stage name. Ellen Bush. All actresses have stage names. My real name's Elena Frolova."

"Who was the fellow that acted with you?"

"My brother Igor."

"And the shaved man?"

"What shaved man?"

"The one who stood by while you were doing your turn. Is he the owner of the show?"

"Owner?" Elena laughed. "Oh, no. He's my father."

"Why did you call him Bush, then?"

"I've already explained that: Bush's our stage name."

"Are you still going round the court-yards?"

"No. Father's signed a contract and as soon as the season opens we'll do our act in Solomonsky's circus. Ever been there?"

"Of course I have. But now we have our own dramatic circle in our block. This is our stage manager," he said pointing to Shura.

Shura drew himself up and made a dignified bow.

"We're putting on our first show on Sunday," Misha continued, "and the play's really good. Come with your brother. You can do your act after the show."

"All right, I'll tell Bush," Elena said. And after a moment's reflection, she asked, "How much will you pay us?"

"What?" Misha did not understand.

"How much will you pay us? For acting, I mean."

"Pay you?" Misha said indignantly. "Are you mad? We're putting on the show for the benefit of the children in the Volga country. All our actors are performing free."

"W-well, I don't know," Elena said, shaking her head doubtfully. "I don't think Bush'll agree."

"You needn't come, then. We'll get along without you. Other people are giving all they can to help the starving and you want to snatch something out of it for yourself. Aren't you ashamed?"

"Don't be angry," Elena laughed, "How stern you are! I'll tell you what we'll do. Igor and I'll ask to go for a walk and we'll come to your show. All right?"



"All right."  
"Well, good-bye," Elena said, shaking hands with Misha and Shura.  
"Only, please, don't be so ratty."  
"I'm not ratty," Misha replied.  
"Oh, arn't girls a nuisance," he said to Shura when Elena went away.

## Chapter 30

### THE PURCHASE

The boys turned their attention to the make-up.  
"These are the most suitable," Shura said, turning a box of coloured pencils in his hand. "This colour's called claret. Take it, Misha."  
Misha put his hand in his pocket to take the money out and in the same second was horrified to find that the purse was gone. For a moment he felt dizzy. The figure of a waif darting in and out of the crowds of people brought Misha round, and, with a desperate shout, he dashed off in hot pursuit.  
The waif ran out from the stalls, turned into an alley and sped on, a long torn coat hampering his movements. Dirty cotton padding was sticking out of the holes, and the sleeves dragged on the ground. He shot into a communicating court-yard, but Misha kept close to his heels and finally caught up with him in a vacant lot.  
"Let's have it back," he breathed heavily, seizing the waif by his tattered coat.  
"Don't touch me, I'm a mental case!" the waif shrieked and rolled the whites of his eyes, giving a frightful look to his black, soot-covered face.



They grappled. The waif yelled shrilly and used his teeth, but Misha knocked him down and, holding him to the ground, searched for the purse in the tatters. The waif squirmed and bit Misha's hand. Misha pulled him by the sleeve. 'It tore off and the purse fell out. A wave of terrible anger took

possession of Misha as he picked it up. He had worked so hard to organize the dramatic circle, talked to the fellows, begged, persuaded, sacrificed his Gogol! And this little thief had almost ruined everything! And the fellows might have thought that he had pocketed the money. Misha was determined to give the waif a good licking.

The waif lay with his face to the ground. In the wide collar of the coat his dirty neck seemed even thinner than it really was, while his bare, dirty, and scratched arm looked odd, sticking out of the torn sleeve.

All right. Misha was not the fellow to hit a man when he was down. He poked the waif with his foot to make him rise.

"That'll teach you not to steal."

But the waif did not get up.

Misha walked off a few steps, then returned.

"Oh, get up," he said gloomily, "stop pretending!"

The waif sat up.

"You satisfied?" he muttered, sobbing and wiping his face with his fist.

"Why'd you steal the purse? I never touched you."

"Go to hell!"

"If you don't stop swearing, I'll add to what I've already given you."

But Misha's anger had passed and he knew he would not hit the waif again.

Still sniffing, the waif picked up the torn sleeve. His coat flew open, showing his naked emaciated body. There was not even a shirt under the coat.

"How are you going to sew it on?" Misha asked, squatting and examining the sleeve.

The waif turned the sleeve round in gloomy silence.

"I'll tell you what," Misha said. "Come home with me and my mother'll sew it on for you."

"Want to run me in," the waif looked distrustfully at him.

"Here's my word! What's your name?"

"Mikhail."

"That's a good one," Misha laughed. "I'm also called Mikhail. Come to our club."

"Been waiting for that all my life!"

"Drop that, come on. The girls there'll sew your sleeve on in a jiffy."

"Been waiting for that all my life!"

"If you don't want to come to the club, come to my place. You'll have dinner with us."

"Been waiting for that all my life!"

"You *are* stubborn!" Misha said, getting angry. "Come on!" He rose and pulled the waif by the good sleeve. "Here, get up!"

"Leggo!" the waif yelled, but it was too late. The thread snapped and the second sleeve was left dangling in Misha's hands.

"There, see," Misha muttered in embarrassment, "I told you to come."

"But you wanted to force me, yes, wanted...."

Now the waif's coat was sleeveless, only his bare arms stuck out of it.

"You'll have to come now," Misha said resolutely, taking the two sleeves. "If you don't, you won't get these and you can go about without sleeves."

## Chapter 31

### MIKHAIL KOROVIN

"What will Mother say?" Misha wondered as he walked beside the waif. "Kick us both out, very likely. Can't be helped now. What's done is done."

They passed Genka at his post. He looked at Misha and his ragged companion in surprise. The boys in the court-yard also stared. Misha counted the lottery money and gave it to Slava.

"Here!" he said. "As soon as Shura comes, give it to him and tell him to buy the make-up. I haven't any time."

When they reached Misha's landing he pushed the waif into the flat.

"Mother, this chap'll have dinner with us."

Mother said nothing.

"I tore his sleeves accidentally. He's also called Mikhail."

"What's his surname?"

Misha glanced at the waif. The latter had started sniffing.

"My surname's Korovin," he said importantly.

"Very well, Comrade Korovin," Mother sighed, "at least go and wash yourself."

Misha took him to the kitchen, but Korovin did not evince any particular desire to wash, and even if he did it would have been quite impossible to wash away the dirt. They stood for a minute in front of the tap, then returned to the room and sat down at the table.

Korovin ate gravely, bringing his spoon down after every swallow. Two dark spots, appeared on the table-cloth where his elbows rested.

Misha ate silently, throwing sidelong looks at Mother from time to time. She had Korovin's coat hanging over the back of a chair and was sewing on the sleeves. The frown on her face told Misha that there would be an unpleasant conversation after Korovin's departure. He lowered his head and continued eating in silence.

After they had finished the soup, Mother served a pan of fried potatoes.

Misha pushed away his plate.

"Thank you, Mother," he said. "I'm full."

"Eat, eat, there's enough for everyone."

She had already sewn on the sleeves and was now sewing in the torn lining.

Korovin finished his dinner and put his spoon on the table.

"There you are," Mother said, smoothing the coat out on her hands and giving it to Korovin, "your coat is ready. Isn't it rather warm to wear in this weather?"

Korovin did not reply immediately. He stood up and pulled the coat on.

"Never mind, we're used to things like that," he muttered.  
"Haven't you any relatives?"  
Silence.  
"Mother, father, anybody?"  
Korovin was near the door already. Instead of replying he began to sniff.  
"Where's he going?" Misha wondered. "Out into the street again?"  
"Where will you go now?" he asked, trying not to look at Mother.  
This question seemed to astonish the waif. He pulled his coat closer round his body and went out with a muttered "Good-bye".  
Misha followed.  
"Wait a second, it's dark here."  
He opened the front door and let Korovin out.  
"Drop in any time you want to," he said on parting. "You'll always find me either at home or in the yard."  
The waif went down the stairs without a word.

### **Chapter 33**

#### **MISHA HAS A TALK WITH MOTHER**

When Misha returned, Mother was sitting at her sewing-machine and threading the needle. The sewing-machine stood near the window and the sunlight was reflected on its metal parts.

Misha took a book and opened it. It was quiet in the room. Only the sewing-machine hummed every time Mother worked the pedal. Misha knew he would get a scolding. There was no avoiding it, as Mother would start talking anyway, but he wished she would hurry and get it over with.

"Where did you meet him?" Mother asked finally, without turning her head.

"In the market. He stole my money."



Mother, stopped the machine and looked at Misha. "What money?"

"From the lottery. I told you about it. Shura and I were buying the make-up."

"Well, and did he return the money?"

Misha smiled.

"He did. I caught up with him. Well, naturally, we fought—"

"That is how you got introduced?" Mother turned to her sewing-machine. "A pretty picture, I must say: fighting in the streets with waifs." "No one saw us, Mother. It happened on a vacant lot. And then we didn't fight, I only pressed him to the ground a bit."

"Yes. ..." Mother shook her head again. "But why did you bring him home with you? To let him steal something here, too?"

"He wouldn't steal."

"How do you know?"

"I think so, that's all."

The silence that ensued was broken only by the even hum of the sewing-machine.

"Are you displeased?" Misha asked. Instead of replying, she said: "But what made you bring him here?" «I don't know."

"Did you feel sorry for him?" Mother turned and scrutinized Misha's face.

"Why sorry," he shrugged. "Just like that—I tore his sleeves and they had to be sewn on."

"Yes, of course," she said, starting the machine again.

The white cloth came off the machine slowly and folded in waves on the floor beside the chair.

"All the same," Misha said, "you're displeased that I brought him."

"I haven't said anything, but, of course, it's not a very pleasant acquaintanceship. That comes first. Secondly you were ready to ask him to live with us. You could have asked me first, you know. I think I, too, am connected in some way to this house."

"That's true," Misha admitted, "but I'm sorry for him; he'll go out into the

street again—and steal."

"Yes, it's a pity!" Mother agreed. "Many people are adopting these children, but... you know yourself that I'm in no position to do so at present."

"You'll see, they'll all be taken off the streets soon," Misha said with feeling. "D'you know how many children's homes have already been opened?"

"Yes, I know," Mother replied, "but all the same it is very difficult to re-educate these children. They have been spoiled by running wild in the street. Everything will be done in time, but our country is still very poor."

"You know, Mother, there's a group of children in Moscow called Young Pioneers, and the fellows there are like Komsomol members ; they work among these homeless children and sort of.. ." he made an indefinite gesture, "do all sorts of things. Genka, Slava, and I have decided to join: We've found out the address already. It's on the Panteleyevka. We're going there on Sunday."

"On the Panteleyevka? But that's miles from here."

"What of it! It's summer and we've got plenty of time. And when we're fourteen we'll join the Komsomol."

Mother looked up and smiled at Misha.

"You're wanting to join the Komsomol already?"

"Not now. They won't accept us yet. But later. . ."

"When you join the Komsomol you'll be so busy you won't have any time for me," Mother sighed, and then smiled.

"Why, Mother!" Misha also smiled. "I'll always have time for you."

He flushed and bent over his book.

"We'll see," Mother said, pushing the pedal of the sewing-machine.

Misha stole a glance at her. She was intent on her work. The tight knot of her chestnut hair touched her green blouse; it was shiny, neatly ironed, and had a smooth collar.

Misha got up, tiptoed to Mother, put his arms round her and pressed his cheek to her hair.

"Well, what is it?" Mother asked, putting her work on her knees.

"D'you know what I think, Mother?" Misha asked, slyly narrowing his eyes. "What?"

"Only you must answer: yes or no." "All right, I'll answer."

"I think—that you're not a bit angry with me. Isn't that true? Say it's true."

Mother laughed softly and tried to free herself from Misha's embrace.

"No, tell me first," Misha cried out merrily. "Tell me! And you know what else I think?"

"What?"

"I think," Misha paused, "that you would have done exactly the same thing. Wouldn't you? Tell me, am I right?"

"Yes, yes," she unclasped his arms and smoothed her hair. "But try not to bring too many waifs into the house."

## Chapter 33

### THE BLACK FAN

"Misha!" Genka called from the court-yard.

Misha put his head out of the window. Genka was standing with his face upturned.

"What d'you want?"

"Come down quickly. It's something important!" Genka squinted in the direction of Filin's storehouse.

"What's happened?" Misha cried impatiently. He wanted to stay at home.

"Hurry!" Genka twisted his face. "Understand?" he added, making all sorts of signs to show that the matter was very urgent.

Misha left the flat and ran down the stairs. When he reached the yard Genka immediately stepped up to him.

"You know where that tall stranger is?"

"Where?"

"In the workmen's dining-room."

Genka led the way there and through the big grimy window they saw people sitting at the small marble tables. The plaster figures on the ceiling seemed to be swimming in blue waves of tobacco smoke.

Filin was at one of the tables. But he was alone. "Well, where's your stranger?" Misha asked. "He was here a minute ago," Genka said in bewilderment, "sitting right there with Filin. Where could he have gone?"

"If he was here he couldn't have gone far," Misha said. "You go to the left, to Smolenskaya Square, and I'll go to the right, to Arbat Square."

Misha walked rapidly in the direction of Arbat Square, closely scanning the street. As he was crossing a side-street he caught a glimpse down it of a man in a white shirt, turning the corner into another side-street, near a church. Misha ran as fast as he could, stopping to look around near the church. The tall stranger was walking quickly along the road toward Kropotkin Street. Misha ran after him. The stranger crossed Kropotkin Street and went down another side-street. Misha caught up with him near Ostozhenka Street, but a tram separated them. When the tram had passed the tall stranger had vanished.

But where? Misha searched the street with his eyes. A stamp shop on the opposite side caught his attention. He had often been in this shop to buy stamps for his collection. And this was the shop, which, according to Genka, Borka Filin had visited for ' some purpose. Misha pushed the door open, making the bell ring sharply.

No one was there. Stamps were lying 'under the glass on the counter and the shelves were filled with boxes and albums. The bell brought the owner, a bald-headed old man with a red nose, out of the back room. He shut the door tightly behind him and asked Misha what he wanted.

"May I see your stamps?"



The old man threw on the counter several envelopes with stamps and returned to the back room, leaving the door slightly ajar in order to keep an



eye on the shop.

While pretending to examine a Bosnia and Herzegovina stamp, Misha looked furtively into the back room. It had no windows and was quite dark; only a shaded lamp stood on the table. There was someone in it besides the old man and they were talking in undertones. Misha could not see the other man, the counter was in the way, but somehow he felt that this other man was the stranger he had followed. He strained his ears to hear what they were talking about, but their voices were too low.

A chair scraped in the back room. Misha was sure the men would come into the shop, and he bent over the stamps in tense anticipation. He would see the stranger any minute now. A door squeaked, and a few minutes later the old man appeared in the shop. This was an unexpected turn. The tall stranger had gone out by the back-door.

"Have you chosen what you want?" the old man asked with a frown as he took his place behind the counter.

"Just a minute," Misha replied, pretending to inspect the stamps carefully.

"Be quick about it," the old man said, "it's time to close the shop."

He went to the back room and this time he did not bother about the door.

The lamp lighted up the edge of the table and in its light Misha saw the



old man's bony hands. He was picking up papers from the table, folding them, and putting them away into a drawer. Then a black fan appeared in his hands. For some time the fan remained open in his hands, then he folded it slowly until it looked like a stick....

Next the old man picked up two shiny metal objects. They looked like a ring and a ball. He put them away in a drawer together with the fan.

## Chapter 34

### AUNT AGRIPPINA

Misha walked home slowly. The mysterious stranger had eluded him. But what he had seen in the stamp shop was very suspicious. The stranger had gone out by the back-door and the shopkeeper had behaved strangely. Then Borka, the Skinflint, was a frequent visitor there....

He thought of the black fan when he was almost home and an extraordinary idea flashed suddenly through his mind. When the old man had folded the fan it had looked like a sheath. And then the ring. Could it be the sheath to his dirk?

He ran to look for his friends to share this exciting idea with them.

They were at Genka's, sitting round the table. Slava was ruling lines on some paper and Genka was writing. He had his feet on the chair and was bent low over the table. Aunt Agrippina, who was sitting opposite them, looked up at Misha over her spectacles, and went on dictating from a sheet of paper held at arm's length above the table and on a level with her eyes.

"Rubtsova, Anna Grigoryevna," she dictated slowly. "Did you write it? Neater, neater, don't hurry. That's it. Semyonova, Yevdokia Gavrilovna."

"Look, Misha," Genka shouted with a merry giggle. "I've got a new job—secretary to the Women's Department!"

"Stop fidgeting," Aunt Agrippina raised her voice, "you'll smudge the page!"

Misha glanced over Genka's shoulder: "List of women workers at the shop who have finished the school for the abolition of illiteracy." Every name was followed by a number: that was the age. All were over forty.

"Why can't you keep still?" Aunt Agrippina grumbled. "Look how neatly Slava is drawing, while you're fidgeting all the time. Well? Have you got Yevdokia Gavrilovna?"

"Yes, yes. Go on. What d'you want to teach all these old women for?"

Aunt Agrippina fixed her eyes on Genka. "What do you mean what for? Are you serious?" "Of course, I'm serious," he said in a quarrelsome tone, although it was obvious that his aunt's question had made him uncomfortable. "There," he jabbed his pen at the list, "fifty-four years old. Can you tell me what she wants to be literate for?"

"So that's what you're like!" Aunt Agrippina said slowly, taking off her spectacles. "That's the kind of boy you are! And I hadn't the faintest idea."

"Why—what's the matter?" said Genka, now quite confused. "I see," Aunt Agrippina said, her eyes on Genka. "So you're the only one who wants to learn to read and write?" "I didn't..." "Be quiet. Don't interrupt. So reading and writing is only for you? All this has been won especially for you? Is that what you think? Semyonova sweated for forty years at the factory and she can die illiterate for all you care. And I, too, studied to no purpose? I lost two sons in the Civil War so that Genka might study and I might remain

what I was before? And Asafyeva, who has been moved into a flat from her cellar. That, too, shouldn't have been done? You'd say that after sixty years in the cellar she might as well die there. Is that what you think? Tell me."

"Auntie," Genka sobbed loudly, "you didn't understand me! I was only joking."

"I understood you quite well," Aunt Agrippina snapped, "quite well, young man. I never thought you had such ideas, Gennady. I never thought you looked upon the worker that way."

"Auntie," Genka whispered dismally, his head lowered, "Auntie! I spoke without thinking. Well—said the first foolish thing that entered my head."

"In that case," Aunt Agrippina admonished, "you've got to think, got to watch what you say." She rose heavily from her chair. "Well, all right, a sin confessed is half forgiven. But the next time, think."

## Chapter-35

### FILIN

Aunt Agrippina went to the kitchen. Genka remained at the table feeling very sorry for himself.

"Well, you got it in the neck?" Misha mocked. "That wasn't half what you deserved. That tongue of yours will get you in hot water."

"Come now, Misha," Slava said in a conciliatory tone, "he admitted he was wrong, didn't he?"

"All right," Misha replied. "Did you see the tall stranger, Genka?"

"I didn't see anyone," Genka answered gloomily, without raising his head.

"Listen then," said Misha nonchalantly, leaning on the edge of the dresser, "while you were sitting here ... I ... saw the sheath."

"What sheath?" Slava asked, not catching Misha's meaning.

"An ordinary one. Belonging to my dirk."

Genka raised his head and looked sceptically at Misha.

"Did you really?" Slava asked.

"Yes. I saw it myself, just now."

"Where?" Genka stood up.

"In the stamp shop in Ostozhenka Street."

"You're a liar!"

"I'm not. I don't lie."

"Great guns!" Genka drawled. "Where does he keep it?"

While Aunt Agrippina was in the kitchen Misha hurriedly told his friends about the stamp dealer, the tall stranger, and the black fan.

"I like that," Genka said in disappointment, "I thought you said you saw the sheath, and here you are telling us about some blinking fan."

"Well, we had an equation with two unknowns," Slava said, "and now there are three: the first is Filin, the second—Nikitsky, and the third—the fan. I suppose you realize, Misha, that if Filin is not our man then the rest is

also fantasy."

"He's right, Misha," Genka said, "maybe you imagined it all."

Misha did not reply. He was still leaning against the edge of the dresser that had a lace-edged cloth spread over it.

On it was a square mirror with bevelled edges and a green petal stuck in the top left-hand corner. A reel of cotton pierced by a long needle lay beside some old photographs in oval frames, with the names of the photographers stamped in gilt letters. The names were different but all the photographs had the same background—a pond between grey curtains and a mist-enveloped summer-house in the distance.

"Of course Slava's right," Misha thought. "But all the same there's something in all this." He looked at Genka.

"If you hadn't quarrelled with your aunt, we could have learned something about Filin."

"What d'you mean?"

"What I say. She knows Filin. She could at least tell us if he's from Revsk or not."

"Why d'you think she won't tell us? I'm sure she will."

"That's what you think. She won't talk to you now."

"She won't talk to *me*? Then you don't know my aunt. She's forgotten everything long ago, especially as I've apologized. She needs a special approach. You'll see in a minute."

Aunt Agrippina returned to the room, gave the boys, who had fallen silent, a searching look, and began clearing the table.

Genka pretended he was continuing a story which his aunt's entrance had interrupted.

"I said to him, 'Your father's a speculator like all your family. Everyone in Revsk knows about you—' "

"Who's that you're talking about?" Aunt Agrippina asked.

"About Borka Filin," Genka said with an innocent look. "I said to him, 'All Revsk knows your name.' And he said, 'We never lived in Revsk. And I don't know what you're talking about'—"

The boys looked at Aunt Agrippina in anticipation. She gave the tablecloth an angry shake.

"What business have you got with him? I've told you time and again not to have anything to do with this Borka Filin. He'll only get you into trouble."

"Then why does he lie? If he comes from Revsk then he should say so and not lie about it."

"Perhaps he's never been to Revsk."

"I never said *he* did, but his father's from Revsk. Why hide it?"

"Perhaps he knows nothing about his father."

"But Filin himself sat near us. He laughed and said: 'We are native Moscovites, proletarians.' "

"Did he say '*proletarians*'?" Aunt Agrippina finally gave in. "If you want to know, his father was a warder, a gendarme in Revsk, and now he's flying the colours of a worker! Proletarians, indeed—"

"You mean Filin himself was a gendarme?" Misha asked.

"No. His father was. Well, like father like son. And you keep away from them."

Aunt Agrippina folded the table-cloth and left the room.

"See that?" Genka exulted, following her with a wink. "And you said she wouldn't say anything. Told us everything! I happen to know my aunt. It's all clear now. Film's our man. That means Nikitsky's here, and the sheath, too. I can just feel that treasure getting warmer!" he rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Everything's not quite clear," Slava objected. "You said yourself that Revsk is full of Filins. Maybe this is another Filin."

"You're talking through your hat!" Genka said with a shake of his head. "The spawn of gendarmes. He's our man, it's a fact."

"All right," Misha said merrily, "he may be our man and he may not. But the fact is that he's from Revsk. Now we'll find out if he ever served on the *Empress Maria*.""

"How are we going to find that out?" Genka asked.

"It's going to be easy. D'you think Borka won't tell us?"

## Chapter 36

### IN KRASNAYA PRESNYA DISTRICT

On Sunday the three friends set out for the print-shop in the Panteleyevka in Krasnaya Presnya district, to see the Young Pioneer detachment. Because of the shortage of electric power the trams did not run on Sundays, and so the boys started out early in the morning.

Arbat Street was enveloped in a grey mist. At this hour it was deserted, even the janitors had not yet come out with their brooms.

The boys walked briskly in the cheerful freshness of the morning. The heels of their shoes rang against the cold, resonant asphalt, echoing in the deserted street. The reflections of their small figures shone in the shop windows.

"How strange to see Arbat Street so deserted!" Misha thought. The street seemed small, narrow, and quiet. You could have a good look at its buildings now. Misha looked around him. There was the "Carnaval" Cinema, and behind it the tall Military Tribunal building. And there was the house where Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin ( [Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin \(1799-1837\)—great Russian poet and founder of realism in Russian literature.—Ed](#)) once lived. An ordinary two-storeyed house with nothing remarkable about it. It was even odd to think that Pushkin had ever lived in it. Of course, he had walked along Arbat Street like everybody else in those days and no one had given it a thought. But if Pushkin were to appear in Arbat Street now, what a fuss there would be! All Moscow would come running!

"We'll see what those Young Pioneers are like," Genka chattered, "we'll see. Maybe we won't like them; we might even find them embroidering

flowers like girls in a children's home."

"You fathead!" Misha said. "They're a communist organization, don't you understand? That means they do something worthwhile."

"Somehow I still feel a bit uncomfortable about going there," Slava said.

"Why?"

"I just do," he said and shrugged his shoulders. "They'll ask us who we are and why we came. I don't feel comfortable somehow."

"But I do," Misha replied firmly. "What's wrong with it? Maybe we also want to be Young Pioneers? We have a right, haven't we?"

The boys fell silent. The splendid morning sun was rising from behind the houses. Its slanting rays cast huge square shadows from the buildings; the shadows were shortening and gradually moving to one side of the street, ousted by the sun that was pouring its bright, blinding light on the other side.

The street was coming to life. Postmen with big leather bags, tightly packed with newspapers, were leaving the post office. Peasants passed by, their milk-cans rattling.

The boys reached Kudrinskaya Square.

"Look there, Genka!" Misha said, pointing to a house on the corner. Its walls had been chipped by bullets and shell splinters. "D'you know why those walls are pock-marked?"

"No."

"Some of the hottest battles of the October Revolution were fought here. Our people shelled the Cadets. ([Members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, the main bourgeois party in tsarist Russia, who participated in all armed counter-revolutionary uprisings against the Soviet power.—Ed](#)). We saw it with Slava. Remember?"

"I wasn't here then," Slava confessed, "and I think you weren't either."

"Me? I was here any number of times! I came here often with Shura. Once we even filled our caps with cartridge-cases. True, that was a long time ago—I was eight then. And, naturally, you never saw us. You had to stay indoors. Your mother never let you out."

The boys arrived in the Panteleyevka.

Through the big windows they saw the print-shop filled with machines. There were no workers in the workshop. Over the gates hung a sign: "Print-shop of the Moscow Publishing House." The boys went to the entrance.

A man, to all appearances the watchman, was sitting behind a low railing in a small hut made of planks, ladling soup out of a large bowl.

Here, too, was a girl of about ten, her short pigtailed tied with red ribbons.

When the boys entered, the watchman raised his head, wiped his moustache with the back of his hand, and looked inquiringly at them.

"Could you please tell us where the Young Pioneer detachment is?" Misha asked him.

"Young Pioneers?"

The watchman picked up his spoon.

"Who sent you, may I ask—the District Committee, or what?"

"Well... we're here—" Misha stammered, "we're here on business."

The little girl looked inquisitively at them. The watchman finished his

soup, and pushed the bowl away.

"We have Young Pioneers. Most likely they're in their club."

"Would you tell us where it is?"

This question seemed to surprise the little girl.

"Hm. You mean to tell me you don't know where the club is?" the watchman asked.

"You see," Misha faltered, "we're from another district. From Khamovniki district."

"O-oh—" the watchman drawled. "Well-well—their club's in the Sadovaya Street. It's not far from here."

"In what Sadovaya Street?"

"Aren't they funny!" the little girl giggled. "They don't know the club. Papa, they don't know where it is."

"Be still!" the watchman said, raising his voice at the little girl. "You know far too much for your age! Show them the way. Maybe they really have some important business," he added with a dubious glance at the boys.

"In a minute."

The little girl rinsed the bowl and spoon under a small water-tank, tied them in a table napkin, and went into the street with the boys.

"I know those Young Pioneers well," she prattled. "Our Vasya's the most important one there—he plays the drum."

Misha gave her a scornful look, but said nothing. No use arguing with her!

"They also have a bugle," the little girl went on. "And you know what strict rules they have! They're not allowed to swear, keep their hands in their pockets or fight with girls. There. They're only allowed to fight the bourgeoisie, and when they do that they have to take off their ties. They're not allowed to fight in ties."

"Don't get under my feet," Misha said sternly.

"And they allow girls to join, too," the little girl continued, paying no attention to him, "not all, only those, well, those that are old enough."

"And how old's your Vasya?" Slava asked.

"Oh—he's big—fourteen, maybe even fifteen. And you know how serious he is! He comes right into the house and takes everything away."

The friends looked at her in astonishment.

"How can he take everything away?" Genka asked.

"Don't you know," the little girl replied importantly, "for those... well, those homes for homeless children. The Young Pioneers go around people's houses and collect things. They took my blouse," she announced proudly.

"Took your blouse?"

"Uh-huh."

"But that isn't right," Genka said. "No one can take anything away."

The little girl looked unhappy for a moment.

"They didn't take it themselves, Mama gave it them."

"And you felt sorry about it?" Slava laughed.

"Not a bit. I wanted to give them my last year's hat, but Vasya said I shouldn't, as I'd have nothing to give the next time. He was right, for in the

morning they took the blouse and then in the evening they came back for the hat." She sighed. "There are lots of homeless children—it'll take a long time to get clothes and shoes for all of them."

They reached the house in Sadovaya Street.

"There, on the third floor," the little girl pointed, and added anxiously, "I'll leave you now, or Vasya might see me."

## Chapter 37

### A SLIGHT MISUNDERSTANDING

The little girl walked away, leaving the boys in front of the door. For some reason they had become timid. A boy peeped out of the doorway, looked at them and vanished, then another fair head popped out and also vanished.

The boys hesitated. Misha suddenly wanted to go home. It was just possible they might be chased away, he thought. But he could not show weakness before Genka and Slava, so he started resolutely up the stairs. Genka and Slava followed.

On the third floor they opened a massive carved oak door and found themselves before a large square room. Against the opposite wall leaned a folded banner with gold tassels and an oval-shaped bronze spear-head. Over the banner a red streamer, stretching across the entire wall carried the words: "The organization of children is the best way of training Communards. *Lenin.*" A drum and bugle lay on a table next to the banner.

A small flag with some kind of emblem stood in each of the four corners of the room. Pictures and posters hung on the walls.

There was no one in the room or on the landing. For a second the friends heard footsteps on the floor above, then everything became still again.

Misha, Genka, and Slava entered the room and began to look round the Young Pioneer Club. The emblems on the four small flags were an owl, a fox, a bear, and a panther. The pictures on the walls had been cut out of newspapers; there was also a big sheet of paper with semaphore rules and the Morse code.

Exercise-books bearing the inscription "Group Log Book" were hanging on a nail.

They were looking at one of the exercise-books when they heard a slight sound behind. Turning, they saw some boys in red ties stealing up to them. Their bearing left no doubt as to their intentions and our friends instantly took up a defensive attitude. When they realized they had been seen the Young Pioneers charged the boys with lusty yells, only to be quickly repulsed.

With Misha in the centre and Genka and Slava protecting the flanks, and one corner of the room giving them cover from the rear, they fought desperately with their hands and feet to prevent their attackers from breaking



through and scattering them.

The Young Pioneers made a second rush, led by a thin fair-haired boy with a stripe on his sleeve. He was very excited and dashed back and forth, urging his comrades on.



"Forward! Steady now... that's it ... steady.... Don't let them get away.... Steady... pull them apart.... Steady!"

The second attack was successful. The Young Pioneers managed to pull Slava away. Misha went to his rescue, breaking up the line, and the boys fought singly.

"That's it ... steady!" the fair-haired boy yelled, clinging to Slava. "Steady... tackle them! Steady.... Seryozha, sound the general alarm!"

One of the Young Pioneers left the fray and started beating the drum furiously.

At last Misha saved Slava and the three boys kicked out at their attackers, backed to the wall, and took up their original position in the corner.

Both sides were badly mauled. All the boys were out of breath. The Young Pioneers' ties were askew, Slava's collar was torn, and Genka felt his red hair with his hand, suspecting he had lost much of it.

"What d'you want?" Misha gasped.

"Shut up, you're prisoners!" the leader shouted. "If you don't we'll put a double reef knot on you."

The drum rolled on desperately, more and more Young Pioneers came running into the room.

"Steady now!" the fair-haired boy cried out, running from one end of the room to the other. "Keep off! These are our prisoners.... Bears, foxes... don't interfere. They're not your prisoners; they're ours ... we caught them."

A stocky, broad-shouldered young man in a singlet, long black trousers, and a red tie, walked quickly into the room.

The fair-haired Young Pioneer saluted.

"Our group has captured three boy scout spies," he reported excitedly. "They were trying to steal the detachment colours. We noticed them when they were still in the street. We saw them whispering near the entrance, watching for a chance to get in."

"Wait a minute," the young man stopped him. "Release them."

The crowd of Young Pioneers who were making a close ring round the boys moved away, and they came out of their corner.

"All right," the young man said, eyeing the boys. "Go on, Vasya."

"Well, they waited for a chance to get in," the fair-haired boy continued, "then they went up the stairs. We climbed to the fourth floor by the back stairs. They looked in here, saw there was no one about and entered, but we jumped on them and made them prisoners." He paused, then asked in a business-like tone, "What shall we do with them now? Try them ourselves, or turn them over?"

"Well," the Young Pioneer leader asked. "Tell me, who are you?"

"Nobody," Misha answered sullenly. "We just came in to see what Young Pioneers are like."

That raised a general laugh.

"They're lying!" Vasya yelled. "They're scouts. I know this one," he pointed to Slava, "he's a patrol leader."

"That's not true!" said Slava flushing hotly. "I've never been a scout!"

"Oh, no? Never? Don't tell us, I know you. We've all seen you many times. Haven't we, Seryozha?"

"Uh-huh," confirmed the drummer, without batting an eyelid.

"See?" Vasya shouted. "They can't deny it now. I know them well. They live in Bronnaya Street."

"That's a lie," said Misha, "we live in Arbat Street."

"In Arbat Street?" the Young Pioneer leader said in surprise. "Then how do you come to be here?"

"We walked.... This is the only place that has a detachment."

"No, it isn't," the leader replied. "There's one at the Goznak Factory, in Khamovniki district. They have a House of Pioneers, too. Why didn't you go there?"

"We didn't know," Misha said uncomfortably. "We were told that there was only one detachment in Moscow—your detachment."

"Who told you?"

"Comrade Zhurbin."

"Comrade Zhurbin? How do you know him?"

"He lives in our block."

"I see," the leader said with a friendly smile. "I know Comrade Zhurbin. You say he told you. But our detachment's not the only one now. There's a detachment at the railway workshops in Sokolniki district and at the Goznak Factory in your district. Where do your parents work?"

"At the Sverdlov Factory," Genka broke in. "We also have a club in our house and our own dramatic circle."

"Yes," Misha backed him up, "we have our own dramatic circle, but ... we ... we want to be Young Pioneers as well."

"All right," the leader laughed. "Everything's clear now. We've had a slight misunderstanding. My boys are still warring against the scouts by force of habit, and you got it by mistake. Never mind, we'll settle everything."

He blew on his flat whistle and in a few seconds the whole detachment lined up along the walls, forming a square, with the leader, Misha, Genka, and Slava in the middle.

The boys looked admiringly at the Young Pioneers. They were not a crowd of boys and girls any more, but a detachment. They stood in formation in their separate groups, with the group flags on the right flank of each. The slanting rays of the bright sun shone through the tall windows and picked out the straight line of red ties. The boys wore shorts and the girls were in gym bloomers. They were all sun-tanned and looked smart.

"Bugler, the salute," the leader commanded. "Boys and girls," he said when the last note faded, "we have visitors from Khamovniki district. They came to find out about our life and work and want to follow our example. They want to be Young Pioneers. Let's ask them to convey to the boys and girls of Khamovniki district our warm Young Pioneer greetings."

And the Young Pioneers of Krasnaya Presnya district gave three cheers for the future Young Pioneers of Khamovniki district.

## Chapter 38

### IMPRESSIONS

The boys spent almost the whole day enjoying the hospitality of the Young Pioneer Club. They were delighted with everything they saw and their minds were full of it all as they walked home in the evening down Sadovaya Street.

" 'A Young Pioneer is healthy and strong'—that's what I call a rule," Genka was saying, "a grand rule. I've got to do more exercises and develop

my muscles."

"They have rules that are more important," Slava remarked.

"Do they? Then name them," Genka challenged.

"All right. For instance: 'A Young Pioneer strives after knowledge. Knowledge and ability are strength in the fight for the workers' cause.' "

"D'you call that more important? Then that's all *you* know! If you're feeble, the bourgeoisie will finish you off in no time, and all the knowledge in the world won't help. Isn't that right. Misha?"

"Two rules are most important," Misha admonished. "The first is that 'A Young Pioneer is loyal to the cause of the working class,' and the second: 'A Young Pioneer is fearless, persevering, and never downhearted.' But most important of all is what Lenin said. Did you hear the Pioneer leader read it out? 'Children, who are the proletarians of the future, should help the Revolution.' That's what is most important."

"And did you notice how the watchman at the print-shop spoke about them?" Slava observed. "With respect."

"I should think so," Misha said, "the whole district knows them, let alone their own print-shop."

"Only why don't they have any guns and things?" Genka said, perplexed. "If only a rifle, just for the sake of appearance. We'll certainly get rifles for our detachment."

"That's where you're wrong," Misha said. "They won't let us have rifles. But when we organize our detachment we'll call the groups by other names. Revolutionary names would be best, like Karl Liebknecht (Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919)—one of the founders of the Communist Party of Germany.—*Ed.*) or Spartacus. (Spartacus—leader of the greatest uprising of slaves in Rome in 74-71 B.C.—*Ed.*) That'll sound better than those animal names. They're really childish."

"That isn't your own idea," Genka pointed out, "they want to change the names as well. You heard the leader mention it?"

"I know, but I thought of it before, as soon as I saw the animal badges. And did you hear the leader say that on International Youth Day they'll recommend the best Young Pioneers to the Komsomol? Would you believe it? That fair-haired fellow'll already be in the Komsomol, and we aren't even Young Pioneers yet."

"Oh, him! He needs a good hiding," Genka grumbled.

"What for?" Misha objected. "They were only defending their banner. How could they know who we were? That fair-haired chap's got the fighting spirit all right."

"Now we've got to go to the Goznak Factory," Slava said. "Maybe they'll let us join the detachment there, or tell us where the House of Young Pioneers is being organized."

"Why should we go there when we have our own factory!" Misha protested. "Didn't you hear their leader say that detachments will be organized at all factories and plants? There's a Komsomol decision about it."

"Phew!" Genka whistled. "Sit around and wait for our director or his father," nodding at Slava, "to do anything. Auntie says they're stingy about

money."

"You will talk when you don't know anything," said Slava taking offence. "Some of the workshops are still idle and the factory has to be self-supporting. It's not so easy, running a factory."

"We must go to the Party cell and to the District Committee," Misha said, "and see Zhurbin while we're about it. The last time we saw him he mentioned the Young Pioneers."

When they were nearing their block the friends heard a noise and shouting coming from the back-yard. They quickened their steps and saw a crowd of fellows standing in a close ring round Korovin. He had his back to the wall and looked from one to another with wild eyes, like a wolf-cub at bay.

Borka Filin made a lunge at him.

"What'd you come here for?" he was yelling. "To steal? Eh? Tell me! To steal? Give it him, chaps!"

Misha pushed his way through the crowd and stood next to the waif.

"Why can't you leave him alone?" he said. "A whole crowd against one. You must be mad, Borka!"

"Lay off, Misha," Genka called, "that's the chap that stole your money! Why stick up for him? They're all alike, these waifs... young thieves and nothing more!" he added contemptuously.

"You're a thief yourself, a red-headed thief," Korovin muttered with a sudden sniff.

A roar of laughter greeted the words.

"Come along to the club," Misha said. "Come with us."

He pulled the waif by his sleeve, but immediately released his hold, remembering that Korovin's sleeves came off easily.

"I'm not coming," Korovin replied in surly tones, with a distrustful look at Genka.

"Quite right," Borka interfered suddenly, "you stay here, old chap. Have a game of penny-pitching with me."

"Come on, come on," Misha said, pulling the waif again, "stop fooling, come on."

## **Chapter 39**

### **ARTISTS**

In the club the members of the dramatic circle, headed by Shura Bolshoi, were painting scenery. Long strips of white paper lay on the stage. Little Vovka Baranov the Whiner was trying in vain to draw an imposing peasant cottage to represent the home of the kulak Pakhomov.

"You miserable whiner, you!" Shura raged. "Can't you draw a simple peasant cottage, and you, the son of an artist!"

"What's that got to do with it?" the Whiner contested. "My father's my father and I'm just myself."

To everyone's surprise Korovin looked at the sketch, picked up a piece of charcoal and began drawing. The outlines of a stove, windows, and long benches rapidly appeared on the white sheets.

"See that?" Misha said, nudging Genka.

"What of it!" Genka said, shaking his red hair scornfully. "There's nothing clever in his being able to draw. I can't see why you bother with him."

"Cut that out!" Misha frowned. "If each of us were to put one waif on the right road, there wouldn't be any left running the streets."

"Rotten paint-brushes!" Korovin said, as if to himself when he had finished the drawing.

Shura gave him some others, but he rejected them too.

"I want the other kind."

Misha pulled out of his pocket what remained of the lottery money and held it out to Korovin.

"Here, go and buy the right ones."

Korovin did not take the money and looked silently at Misha.

"Well, go and buy them," Misha said. "What are you staring at me for?"

Korovin took the money half-heartedly, looked silently at the boys, and went out of the club.

"Wow!" Genka exclaimed. "That's good-bye to our money!"

"If you go about throwing our money away like that," Shura announced, "then I wash my hands of all responsibility for the show."

"Don't get hot and bothered before you know. Let's wait for him to come back," Misha said.

The boys waited in agony. The adults began to arrive, but there was no sign of Korovin.

"Will he cheat me?" Misha wondered, but then remembered the look Korovin gave him when he took the money. "No. He'll come back."

But there was still no sign of Korovin.

"No use waiting any longer," Shura said. "Go on, Whiner, finish the job."

Vovka had just begun mixing the paints when suddenly the door of the club opened and Korovin appeared. He was not alone. A tall, dark girl with black bobbed hair led him in by the shoulder. She was dressed in a blue skirt and a khaki tunic, held in at her slim waist by a broad army belt. But the most interesting item of her dress was a red tie, a real Young Pioneer tie. She held Korovin's shoulder firmly with one hand and in her other hand was a bundle of paintbrushes.

The girl looked very determined.

"Which of you sent him for brushes?" she asked sternly as she came up to the boys, still gripping Korovin. "I did," Misha replied timidly. "Why?" "What do you need brushes for?" "We're painting scenery for our show."

The girl released Korovin, went up to the stage and looked in surprise at the scenery.

"What play are you putting on?"

Shurka Bolshoi took a step forward.

"*The Kulak and the Farm-hand*" he said importantly. "By the way, allow me to introduce myself: Shura Ogureyev. Art director and stage manager."

He held out his hand.

The girl laughed as she ceremoniously shook hands with Shura. "I am Valya Ivanova. From the district House of Young Pioneers."

"May I ask what's wrong?" Shura said.

"The fact is," the girl's voice grew stern again, "that we're trying to stop waifs stealing, and here you are teaching them to steal. He came and stole our paint-brushes."

"I didn't," Korovin mumbled. "I only borrowed them." Misha looked at the girl with astonishment. She looked not more than seventeen and was already a Young Pioneer leader, and working in the House of Young Pioneers.

"Where's that House of yours?" he asked distrustfully. "In Devichye Polye," the girl hesitated. "Strictly speaking, it's only just being organized. But tell me what's this curious circle of yours? Who directs you? What organization do you belong to?" "To the House Committee!" Genka yelled.

"Indeed!" the girl laughed. "Do you know what Young Pioneers are?" she asked, looking at the boys.

"Yes," cried Misha, Genka, and Slava in unison, but the "No, we don't!" of the others drowned their voices.

"Not so loud!" the girl cried out, raising her hand. "Pioneers," she continued, when silence was restored, "are the successors of the Young Communists. All children are now joining Young Pioneer detachments and in them they are learning to be Young Communists in the future, and later real Communists." She gave the boys a sly look and smiled. "You think I came about the paint-brushes? No. I could have just taken them away from him. But he said he was taking them to some boys in a dramatic circle. And I wanted to see

for myself."

"We're worth looking at!" Genka shouted.

Then when the laughter subsided, he added:

"We'll also be Young Pioneers!"

"I don't doubt it," the girl said. "I'll find out about your club and how you can be helped. Meanwhile come and see us at the House of Young Pioneers. We are going to have various workshops and circles. Be sure to come. Then you can bring back the paint-brushes. Who's your leader?"

Genka pushed Misha forward.

"He's our chairman," he said.

"Good," the girl said with an approving look at Misha. "You'll be responsible for these brushes. Get your people together and come to see us. Don't forget."

"All right," Misha said. "And you come to see our show on Sunday."

When the girl left, Korovin returned the money to Misha and began painting.

"Why didn't you go to the shop for them?" Misha asked him.

"That would have been a waste of money!" Korovin said with a look at Genka. "I didn't do it for myself."

"He's not in the habit of paying for things," Genka scoffed. Then he added

in a kinder tone, "All right—get on with the painting."

## Chapter 40

### EXPERIENCED SLEUTHS

There he goes!" Genka whispered giving Slava a push. "Come on."

Filin came out of the gates, turned into Nikolsky Lane and made for Kropotkin Street. Genka and Slava who had been watching out for him followed, attentively studying his rolling gait.

"D'you notice how he walks," Genka whispered. "He must have been a sailor, some time. Look how far apart he keeps his feet, as though he's walking on deck."

"I don't see anything unusual," Slava argued, "Everybody walks like that. Then he's in top boots. Sailors always wear bell-bottomed trousers."

"The trousers have nothing to do with it! Wait till he turns round and take a peek at his face. You'll see it's as red as a beet-root. It's clear that it got weather-beaten on a ship."

"His face is certainly red," Slava agreed, "but don't forget that Film's a drunkard. Vodka makes the face red."

"No, it doesn't!" Genka argued heatedly. "Vodka gives you a red nose and makes your face turn purple."

"Then, look," Slava continued, "he's got his hands in his pockets. A real sailor would never do that. A real sailor always swings them because he's accustomed to keeping his balance when the ship rolls."

"For heaven's sake, Slava," Genka said, getting nettled, "come off it. Hands in his pockets.... You know, sailors reckon it's very smart to keep their hands in their pockets and their pipes between their teeth during a storm. So there. What's more, if you don't believe Filin's the man, then you should have stayed at home."

They said no more but continued to follow Filin. He crossed Kropotkin Street, stopped in front of the stamp shop, looked around and entered.

"So that's that," Slava said, "nothing more for us here."

"Let's go into the shop," Genka suggested after a moment's hesitation.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Genka!" Slava reproached him. "We agreed we wouldn't. And Misha said we weren't to go into the shop. The old man turned Misha out and he'll do the same; with us."

"No, he won't. Who can stop us going in to buy stamps? Come on." ,<sup>J</sup>

Slava tried to hold him back but it was too late. Genka had already pushed open the door of the shop and Slava had to follow him in.

The old stamp dealer was standing behind the counter talking to Filin. They stopped talking when the boys entered.

"What do you want?" the old man asked suspiciously. "You come in to look every day and don't buy anything. Well, what stamps do you want?"

"Guatemala," Genka whispered in confusion.



The old man took down a box from the shelf, pulled out an envelope and threw it on the counter.

"There, find what you want."

Genka began to look through the stamps nervously. Everyone watched him silently. Finally he could bear it no longer and pointed to one of the stamps.

"That one," he said.

The stamp dealer put away the envelope, leaving on the counter the stamp Genka had chosen.

"Twenty kopeks."

Genka looked helplessly at Slava. Slava realized at once that Genka had no money. But neither had he.

The old man and Filin looked intently at the boys.

"Well," repeated the old man, "twenty kopeks."

Instead of replying Genka turned and ran headlong out of the shop. Slava rushed after him. They ran across the street and hurriedly made their way home.

"I told you not to go in," Slava began.

"Well, what of it?" Genka replied in an off-hand manner.

"What d'you mean by that? They've had a good look at us now and know we're watching them."

"How can they know? Dozens of chaps go into the shop without money."

"Just wait. You'll get it from Misha."

"I don't take orders from him!" Genka said with an independent air. "What do I care!"

"Misha doesn't give orders, but the dirk's his and you might spoil everything with your stupid nonsense."

"I know my own business," Genka cut him short. "I've got a mind of my own!"

They had now reached their house and found Misha just coming down the stairs from Zhurbin's.

"Hey, Misha," Genka called as if nothing were the matter, "we've got some news for you!"

"What is it?"

"Everything's fine!" Genka said in a whisper. "We tracked down Filin. He went to see that old stamp dealer. We noticed the way he walks. He's a sailor all right, you can bet your life!"

"There you are!" Misha said. "That's what I always said. And everything's all right with me. I saw Zhurbin, then I went to the House of Young Pioneers and spoke to the secretary of the Komsomol cell."

"What'd you find out?"

"You'll see on Sunday," Misha replied mysteriously.

"Can't you tell us now?"

"You'll see when the time comes. Everything's all right. Now we have to find out for sure whether Filin ever served on the battleship. After that we'll tackle the stamp dealer. Only you'll have to do it: he won't let me into his shop any more."

"Don't you worry, Misha," said Slava, who had been silent till then, "we can't do it." He threw a meaning glance at Genka.

"Why?"

"Because he won't let us in, either."

"Why won't he?" Misha asked, looking perplexedly from one to the other. "Whatever's happened?"

"Let him tell you," Slava nodded at Genka.

"You see, Misha," Genka blustered, his face very red, "we were trailing Filin, to find out where he was going. He turned into an alley and we did the same. He went down the Ostozhenka and so did we. He went into the shop and we followed. And in the shop we hadn't any money to pay for the stamps. Well, we calmly turned round and walked out. That's all."

"I see," Misha drawled, shaking his head. "In other words you got caught. How many times did I tell you not to go into the shop. And now you've messed up the whole thing and none of us can go to the shop. That's the second time you've bungled everything. The first time you blabbed out about the boxes to Borka and now you've messed up everything at the shop. I'm finished with you. We'll have to manage without you."

This time Genka did not argue. He knew that Misha's anger would pass and that he would not do anything without him.

## Chapter 41

### THE PERFORMANCE

Sunday. *The Kulak and the Farm-hand*, a play in three acts for children, read the announcement that had hung on the door of the club for several days now. Further the announcement read: Studio Director—Shura Ogureyev. Stage Manager—Shura Ogureyev. In the leading role—Shura Ogureyev. And at the very bottom in small letters were the words: Artist—Mikhail Korovin, directed by Shura Ogureyev.

Korovin was very proud to see his name in the announcement which was read by crowds of waifs.

The tickets sold out quickly and the boys handed the proceeds to the newspaper *Izvestia* to be put into the relief fund for the people starving in the Volga country.

On Sunday morning the club was filled with children; they made a lot of noise, climbed over the backs of the chairs, and quarrelled. Children came from neighbouring buildings and Korovin brought in a large crowd of waifs. Igor and Elena, the acrobats, also came, and Misha gave them seats in the front row and left them in Slava's care.

When everything was ready Misha ran to invite Zhurbin. In Zhurbin's flat he found Valya Ivanova and another Young Communist in a cap and leather jacket, with a bundle of newspapers sticking out of his pocket. The jacket was unbuttoned and revealed a blue Russian blouse with a Young

Communist badge pinned to it.

"This is the boy who started it," Zhurbin said pointing to Misha.

"We've already met," Valya remarked with a friendly smile at Misha.

"My name is Nikolai Sevostyanov," said the Young Communist, holding out his hand.

He looked closely at Misha while he spoke, standing with his body bent slightly forward. Tall and somewhat round-shouldered, a tuft of blond hair escaping from under his cap and hanging over his pale forehead, his look was so close and attentive that Misha felt as though his grey, tired, and very clever eyes were boring right through him.

"Comrade Sevostyanov wants to see your performance," Zhurbin said, "when it's over he will make an announcement."

Mitya Sakharov, the club manager, made a speech before the curtain rose.

"Comrades!" he said, tossing back his hair and addressing his words more to Zhurbin than to the audience, "you will now see a play produced by the children's dramatic circle of our club."

He tossed his hair back again.

"Our club gave the circle all the funds it needed to produce the play because it attaches great importance to work among children. We hope that our expenses will be fully covered. And now, comrades, let us call the performers." He clapped his hands and the entire hall responded with a thunderous applause.

The show was a great success.

Zina Kruglova produced a sensation, when, during the show, she gave Shura a resounding whack across his back with the oven prongs. The young spectators were so delighted that they shouted: "Go it, Zina, give it him good and strong!" And like a true actor, Shura did not even show that the blow was painful.

As an epilogue all the performers joined in a song and dance. To round it off Elena and Igor gave a performance, with Slava accompanying them on the piano.

After that Nikolai Sevostyanov climbed on to the stage.

"Did you like it?" he asked, scanning the faces of the spectators.

"Yes, yes!" they chorused.

"You see," Nikolai said, "the boys and girls of this block have done some good and useful work. They are sharing in the activities of the club and helping our little comrades in the Volga country. Tell me, do you think they've done a good job?"

"Yes," the children chorused again.

"That's fine," Nikolai continued. "I shall now ask you a question—" He stood silent for a moment while the audience waited. "Now tell me, have you ever heard of the Young Pioneers?"

"Yes, yes!" Genka yelled at the top of his voice.

Misha nudged him.

"Stop yelling! *You* may know, but the others don't."

There was a loud clamour in the hall. Some children cried "We know," others shouted "No, we don't." Each group tried to outshout the other, and in

some parts of the hall there was skirmishing.

Nikolai raised his hand for order, and when silence was restored, continued :

"Young Pioneers are the children who will grow up to be Young Communists. Young Pioneers are called upon to complete the work begun by their fathers and elder brothers—the work of building communism. Detachments of Young Pioneers are helping the Party and the Young Communists to bring up children in the communist spirit. In our district there are already three detachments: at the Rubber Factory, at the 'Livers' Works and at the Goznak Factory."

"Why haven't we got one?" Misha asked.

"That's what I want to talk to you about. Boys and girls, this club is being taken over by our factory, and at the factory we're organizing a Young Pioneer detachment."

"Hooray!" Genka yelled.

He wanted to shout something else, but Misha poked him again in the ribs and he fell silent.

"I think that's all," Nikolai concluded. "Those that want to join can sign up with me now, and we'll have our first meeting to-day."

"I'm going to ask him something," Genka mumbled.

"What?" Misha asked, pricking up his ears.

"Whether Young Pioneers are allowed to fight boy scouts."

"Stupid questions again!" Misha said angrily. "I just can't understand your habit of talking for the sake of talking. Talk sense when you open your mouth."





#### Part IV

#### DETACHMENT No. 17

#### Chapter 42

#### YOUNG PIONEERS

" 'A Young Pioneer does his work quickly and tidily,' " said Genka, holding forth as he swung his hammer.

He was standing on the top rung of a wooden ladder and nailing a poster to the wall near the ceiling.

"That's right: 'quickly and tidily,' and you've already wasted a whole hour over it," Slava observed. With one hand he was holding the ladder and with the other the lower end of the poster.

The factory was at last working to its full capacity and now the club was getting ready to celebrate the occasion. Garlands of fir-tree branches with coloured lamps in them hung from the ceiling. The Young Pioneers were putting the last touches to their group corners and everywhere the hall smelled of pinewood, carpenter's glue, and paint.

All the Young Pioneers were wearing new khaki-coloured uniforms which they had received from the factory management when they went up to take the Young Pioneer oath. The detachment had been presented with a banner, drum, and bugle.

"Now, boys and girls," the factory director had said, "our country has a shortage of shoes and clothes; it is only just dragging itself out of the ruins, but for you it is sparing nothing. Remember that."

Misha watched Genka working.

"Come down, enough of your tongue-wagging!" he called out when his

friend nailed home the second end of the poster.

Genka came down the ladder and stood next to Misha and Slava, and together the three of them contentedly surveyed their work.

A plywood board with the words: "Red Fleet Group No. 1," hung in the centre of the group corner. The words had been cut out of the plywood and red paper had been pasted on the back. An electric lamp had been fitted behind the board and it made the red letters glow. The effect was splendid.

"Well? How d'you like it?" Genka boasted. "No one else thought of such an idea!" He pointed to the other groups.

Indeed, none of the other groups had an illuminated board. Their corners were modestly decorated, ornamented with drawings, newspaper cuttings, and slogans.

Just then little Vovka Baranov ran past with a can of paint in his hand. He almost bumped into Genka, who jumped aside and cast a frightened look at the sleeve of his brand-new tunic, to see if the Whiner had smudged it. But nothing had happened.

"That wretched whiner!" Genka said angrily. "Runs about like a madman! Almost smudged my tunic!" He felt it fondly. "First-class material!" he said, smacking his lips. "That's a textile industry for you! Something for the chaps at the Rubber Factory to look up to! I get a pain just listening to those chaps swanking about them being chemists and rubbermen.... They'll find out all about being 'rubber-men' when they get rubber overalls."

Nikolai Sevostyanov joined them.

"I say, Nikolai," Genka said to him, "look at that, isn't it great? Better than all the others!"

"Not bad," Nikolai replied indifferently. "And I don't think you've anything to boast about. You are all older than the boys and girls in the other groups, and your decorations should be the best. Polyakov!" he turned to Misha.

"Yes?" Misha answered.

"Quickly, take your group out to the playground. Korovin is there with his chaps."

"Right!"

"And bear in mind," Nikolai continued, "the first meeting's the most important. If you succeed in making friends they'll visit us regularly. If you don't they'll never come again. Be sociable. First, try to get them to join you in a game. Understand? Well, off you go!"

"Red Fleet Group," Misha called out, "fall in."

## **Chapter 43**

### **THE PLAYGROUND**

The group consisted of the older children of the detachment; they included Misha, their group leader, Slava, Genka, Shura, Zina Kruglova, and a

number of other boys and girls from neighbouring houses.

They lined up quickly and went out at the double to the playground, as the court-yard was now called. Except for the addition of a volleyball net nothing had changed there.

About ten waifs sat huddled together on the asphalt near the building. Some of them were smoking and all were ragged and dirty and their hair was long and unkempt. Only one of them was wearing a new grey cap which he had obviously acquired that very day. They were sitting quietly, exchanging remarks now and then and paid no attention whatever to the children standing round and watching them with frank curiosity.

As soon as the Young Pioneers reached the playground they broke up into two teams, an arrangement they had agreed upon beforehand, and one of the teams went to the volleyball court.

"We need six more players!" Misha shouted out, in this way inviting the waifs to a game.

The waifs made no move, and while the Young Pioneers played they remained sitting as before, disinterested in the game and in everything around them.

"They're not giving in!" Genka whispered to Misha.

Instead of answering Misha served the ball, and with a long drive sent it right into the group of waifs. But this, too, failed to make an impression. Korovin lazily kicked the ball back.

The Young Pioneers played excitedly, punctuating every second with cries of "pass," "your ball," "drive," "sink," "candle," "blow it out," "butter fingers." But this did not stir the waifs. Some, with their backs against the wall, were already dozing or blinking in the sun.

"They're taking our measure, of course. Can't draw them in immediately," Misha thought. "We'll have to watch out or they'll go away."

He blew his whistle and the game stopped. The girls remained on the court while the boys sat down beside the waifs.

"Hello, Korovin!" Misha opened. "How are things, namesake?"

"Not so bad," Korovin replied grudgingly.

"What's that pole?" one of the waifs asked suddenly, pointing to a home-made horizontal bar consisting of a piece of water-piping wedged between two trees. The waif had such an abundance of freckles on his face that even the thick layer of dirt could not hide them.

"That's a horizontal bar," Misha explained eagerly.

"What's it for?"

"Watch here, I'll show you." Misha went to the horizontal bar, pulled himself up by his arms and dropped back to the ground. "Think you can do it?"

"Don't know, never tried," the waif answered.

"Go ahead, try it," Misha offered.

"Why not? I think I will...."

He got up lazily, slouched up to the bar, looked at it for a minute with a doubtful shake of his head, then jumped and pulled himself up. His coat rose over his head and a pair of dirty bare legs dangled in the air, but he had

pulled himself up all the same.

Then he jumped down and waddled back to his place. The waifs grinned and cast mocking glances at the Young Pioneers.

"That's first rate!" Misha said. "That's about as good as any of us. Here, Genka, you try."

"Not me, I can't," Genka replied.

"Go on, it won't hurt you to try," Misha said persuasively.

Genka stood under the horizontal bar, raised his head, and stretched up his arms. Then from a crouch position he sprang up, gripped the bar, and began to swing, keeping his legs tautly extended.

He swung faster and faster and suddenly stopped in a handstand. This was followed by a second handstand after he had swung himself round the bar again. Then a third handstand. He described rapid circles and his red tie flew after him. His swings became slower and slower and finally he hopped back to the ground.

"Not bad," Korovin said. .

"That's called 'turning the sun'," Misha explained.

"What's that to us?" said the waif in the cap.

"It might come in useful," Shura Bolshoi put in suddenly. "You have to be able to do and know everything," he admonished.

"Ah, the 'kulak'?" a small waif giggled. "They gave you a good whack on the pants with the oven prongs."

"What of it," Shura said, "a real actor has to grow used to everything. Art demands sacrifices."

"That's true," the waif in the cap affirmed. "Lazarenko, the acrobat, is always risking his neck, but keeps on jumping."

"And in the circus they somersault right under the top and aren't afraid," the waif with the freckles caught up.

That set the ball rolling. Shura Bolshoi led the conversation. He was just going to tell them all about the new picture *Brigade Commander Ivanov* when an unexpected circumstance broke up the talk so successfully started.

## Chapter 44

### YURA'S BICYCLE

Yura the Scout and Borka appeared in the court, and their appearance was a spectacular one, for they rode in on a bicycle. It was a ladies' bicycle, but it was real, two-wheeled and brand-new and had a bright silk net over the rear wheel.

Yura was standing and pedalling, while Borka was in the saddle, his legs wide apart and his mouth stretched from ear to ear in a triumphant grin.

They circled round the court, then Borka got off and Yura went off alone and gave an exhibition of fancy riding.

He rode with his arms folded, brought his knees on the saddle, did the



"swallow," rode by using only one pedal, and expertly jumped off the bicycle. While this was going on Borka tried to draw everyone's attention to Yura and shouted with all his might "How d'you like that!" "That's right," "Show 'em, Yura!" In his excess of enthusiasm he clapped his hands against his trousers and threw his cap in the air.

All eyes were turned towards Yura. The conversation between the Young Pioneers and the waifs was interrupted.

"They're doing it on purpose," Misha thought, "they want to break up our work."

"Let's give it them," Genka suggested in a whisper.

But Misha waved him aside. It would not do to start a fight! That would only spoil things.



His mind was working feverishly to find some solution when suddenly he saw Yura's father, Doctor Stotsky, standing near the gates. Misha glanced at Yura, but he had not noticed his father; he was round the corner of the building, adjusting the bicycle chain with Borka's assistance.

"Yu-ra-a-a," Misha called, "come here!" He winked at Genka with a nod at Yura's father.

Yura turned round and looked perplexedly at Misha. He walked up indecisively, wheeling his bicycle.

"What make?" Misha nodded at the bicycle.

"Royal Enfield."

"Oh, a Royal Enfield!" Misha fingered the bicycle. "Not a bad bike."

Korovin and the waif in the cap also began feeling the bicycle.



Genka suddenly put his fingers in his mouth and whistled as loudly as he could. This attracted the doctor standing near the gate; he turned his head and, seeing Yura, quickly came up to the boys. He was a handsome man with a smooth-shaven face and plump white hands. He exuded a smell that was a mixture of eau-de-Cologne and a chemist's shop.

Yura stood beside his bicycle and looked with discomfiture at his father.

"Yura," the doctor said sternly, "go home."

"But . . ." Yura began.

"Go home," the doctor repeated icily; he surveyed the waifs, turned up his nose in disgust, swivelled on his heel, and walked out of the court-yard.

Yura followed him, wheeling the bicycle and accompanied by the uproarious laughter of all the children.

"That made him look a fool," said Korovin.

"He shouldn't swank," moralized the freckle-faced waif.

## Chapter 45

### THE RIBBON

The conversation was resumed and the boys chatted for a whole hour. When they went the waifs promised to come the next day.

The Young Pioneers were pleased with their first success and animatedly discussed the behaviour of the waifs. Not far away Borka was sitting on the asphalt path playing a lone game of penny-pitching.

"Hey, Skinflint," Genka called to him, "why aren't you riding a bicycle?"

Borka held his tongue.

"You just remember," Genka continued, "you just get it into that thick head of yours and tell your miserable scout friend that if you try to spoil our

work again we'll give it you so hard you won't forget it in a year."

Borka continued to hold his tongue.

"Stop getting at him, Genka," Misha said, in a generous tone. "There's no need to pick a quarrel. Borka's all right, if only he wouldn't pal up with the scout."

Meanwhile Borka listened attentively, fearing that some trick was being played on him.

"I just don't see why they're friends," Misha continued. "Yura doesn't even regard him as a human being. Did you see the way his father looked at us?"

Borka again said nothing; he was at a loss to understand what Misha was driving at.

"You all saw it, didn't you?" Misha repeated, and turning to Borka said, "It's true what I say, isn't it, Borka?"

"What are you trying to persuade me for?" Borka replied. "D'you want me to join the Young Pioneers? Well, I don't need your Young Pioneers. You're just wasting your time."

"No one'll let you join!" Genka shouted.

"Just a minute," said Misha, interrupting him, then continued to address Borka: "I'm not trying to persuade you. I'm just telling you. And then another thing. I'd like you to help me in something. Something big. Slava and I spoke about it only yesterday. Isn't that right, Slava?"

Slava did not catch Misha's meaning but all the same he confirmed that they had talked about it the previous day. "What d'you want?" Borka asked cautiously. "Well, you see," Misha said, "we're putting on a new play all about sailors and we need a sailor's uniform. You understand? A real striped jersey, trousers, and cap. It doesn't matter whether they're old or new. The main thing is that the name of the ship should be real. The ribbon, for example. That's why I wanted to speak with you. You know all the ins and outs of it. Perhaps you could get it for us?"

"Wouldn't I just like to do something for you," Borka jeered. "Especially for nothing! You're looking for some fool, it seems to me!"

"Nothing of the sort. We'll pay."

"Hm!" Borka became thoughtful. "How much?"

"We've got to see first. D'you think you can get it?"

"I can get anything." He looked at Misha. "Will you swop me your knife? I'll bring the ribbon right away."

"A real ribbon?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

"All right. Fetch it."

"You're not kidding me?" Borka said, getting up. "I've given my word. Bring it and you'll get the knife."

Borka ran home.

"What are you up to, Misha?" Shura Bolshoi said indignantly "What's this play you're going to put on? Why don't I know anything about it?"

"I'll tell you later. This is some other business."

"What d'you mean by 'later'? After all, I'm the director of the detachment's

dramatic circle!"

"Don't get so worked up," Genka said. "Misha knows what he's doing; that's why he's group leader."

"And I'm the stage manager; I'm responsible for the plays." "Go on being responsible," Genka said shrugging his shoulders, "no one's stopping you."

"Shut up," Misha stopped them. "There's Borka coming."

Borka ran up to them; he had something in his hand.

"Come on, hand over that knife!"

"Show what you got first."

Borka opened his hand slightly and showed the edge of a crumpled black ribbon.

"Let me have a look," Misha said, putting out his hand. "Maybe it isn't a real one."

Borka quickly closed his fist.

"Catch me handing it over. Give me the knife first. Don't worry, it's a real one. I'll stake my head on that."

"Well, I'll take a chance!" Misha sighed, handing Borka the knife.

Borka grabbed it and gave Misha the ribbon. He unfolded it, while Genka and Slava leaned over him.

On the well-worn ribbon the boys saw distinct traces of the silver lettering: *Empress Maria*.

## Chapter 46

### PLANS

From that day the waifs regularly came to the playground. They brought their friends, played *lapta* (*Lapta—a Russian ball game.—Tr.*) and volleyball with the Young Pioneers and listened to Shura's stories. But though it was hot in the July sun it was impossible to make them take off their rags.

A hot, pungent smell came from the huge boilers in which asphalt was being melted, and from the newly laid asphalt smoking on the roped-off stretches of pavement.

Tram-cars, freshly painted and with advertisements on them, crawled slowly along the streets, their drivers frenziedly clanging the bells at the workmen repairing the road. The court-yards were filled with boilers, radiators, pipes, bricks, barrels of cement and lime. Moscow was being rebuilt.

"The Tsindel Factory's working again," said Genka who always had the latest news. He pointed to a wisp of smoke rising from a factory chimney in the distance somewhere on the other side of the buildings. "It started working yesterday, and to-morrow the Tryokhgornaya Textile Mills will start up."

"You seem to know everything," Misha mocked, "even whose chimney's

smoking. But what's going on here?" He pointed to some electricians working on posts.

"Can't you see? They're electricians mending the wires."

" 'Mending wires'," Misha teased. "A fat lot you know! Why are they mending them?"

"They broke down, I suppose."

"That just shows how much you know! They've started up the Shatura Power Station, that's what. It works on peat. Now the lamps will burn all night, and on both sides of the street, too. See? And they're finishing the Kashira station that'll work on coal. And they're building the first hydro-electric power station on the Volkhov; the water's going to turn it...."

"I know all that without you telling me," Genka said. "D'you think you're the only one who reads the papers?"

Genka really did have a whole batch of newspapers at home, but all were copies of the *Izvestia* of the same issue. Under the heading *Volga Country Relief Fund*, it carried a line which said: "From the children of Tenants' Society No. 267—87 roubles." All the children were very proud of this, and Genka always had a copy of the newspaper with him and lost no opportunity of showing it.

The days passed and the boys could not think of any way to get hold of the sheath. Now that it was definitely established that Filin was the man they were looking for, they had to find out definitely whether what Misha had seen at the stamp dealer's was the sheath or whether it was only a fan. But how were they to do it?

"Get in when the old man's not there, that's how," said Genka. "They're bandits so we don't have to stand on ceremony."

"How do you think you can get in?"

"Easy. Through the window. Better still would be to let your new friend, Korovin, do it. He's an expert in that field."

"You'd better keep your mouth shut," Misha said. "It's all your fault that we can't show our noses in the shop. We tried yesterday, and he wouldn't even let us in. The fact is, he's suspicious. And there's no need to drag Korovin into this. A fine thing it would be for us to get him to climb through the window. What would he think of us Young Pioneers then? And he doesn't know anything about the dirk. No, we have to think of some other way."

And Misha did think of a way. Only the thought came to him several days later—when he was spending a week-end with the detachment, camping by Lake Senezh

## Chapter 47

### PREPARING FOR CAMP

The day they were to leave for camp Misha woke up early.

It was already light in the room and through the windows the grey walls of the neighbouring buildings could be distinguished in the early morning mist. Dim lamps were flickering in some of the windows.

"What time is it, Mother?" Misha asked, springing out of bed.

"Five. Go back to sleep; there's plenty of time."

Mother was moving about the room, laying the table for breakfast.

"No. I have to get up," Misha said dressing quickly. "I must go and get the others. They're probably still asleep."

"Only eat something first," Mother said.

"In a minute."

Misha washed hurriedly and began packing his haversack.

"Mother," he cried in desperation, "where's my spoon?"

"Where you put it yourself."

"But it isn't here!"

Misha rummaged hastily in the haversack.

"Oh, here it is."

"No one's touched your haversack."

Mother yawned and shivered with the cold. "And don't rummage about in it or you'll turn everything upside down. Here, drink your tea and I'll roll your blanket for you."

"No, no, you don't know how to."

Misha rolled the blanket and tied it to the haversack, which already had a mug, and a mess-tin dangling from it.

"That's how you have to do it."

"All right. Do it yourself. And when you're there don't lose anything and, please, don't swim out far."

"I know without you telling me," Misha said, scalding himself with the tea. "You don't seem to realize I'm not little any more. You'll see, when I return from camp, I'll break up that thing," he pointed to the brick stove in the corner. "The steam heating will be turned on soon. It'll be warm then, you'll see!"

"I'll let you do it only when they turn it on," Mother replied.

Misha ran out of the flat, the haversack over his shoulder.



He collided with Genka on the landing. He, too, was fully rigged out for camp. Misha sent him to the playground to collect the other children, and went upstairs to Slava's flat.

As he expected, Slava was still asleep.

"I knew it!" Misha said angrily.

"How long do you intend to sleep?"

"But we agreed that you'd come for me," Slava protested, stretching his arms and rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"You've got to rely on yourself.

Get dressed quickly."

Misha went to the piano and irritably turned over some pages of music.

Konstantin Alekseyevich, Slava's father, came out of the bedroom. His heavy paunch sagged over the belt round his trousers. The open neck of his Russian shirt revealed a powerful chest covered with a thick growth of red hair. His small eyes now heavy with sleep seemed like narrow slits in his plump, kindly face.

"Well, Young Pioneers," he said, yawning, "so you're off to camp?" He held out his hand to Misha. "Good morning, Comrade Commander. Dressing down your men early? That's the right idea!" "Good morning," Misha replied. "We were just talking." For some reason he always felt embarrassed in the presence of Konstantin Alekseyevich. Misha always felt he was enjoying some joke at his and the other boys' expense. In addition, Konstantin Alekseyevich was the chief engineer at the factory, a "specialist," as Agrippina Tikhonovna put it.

"Well, well, carry on."

Konstantin Alekseyevich shuffled to the kitchen. Soon the boys heard the hiss of a primus-stove.

"Oh, bother," Misha thought gloomily. "He's making tea! Now we'll be late and all because of Slava!"

"Kostya!" Alia Sergeyevna's voice came from the bedroom. "Kostya!"

"Father's in the kitchen," Slava shouted.

"Slava! Slava!"

"Yes, Mother?"

"Tell Father to pack the rissoles in wax paper."

"All right," Slava answered, lacing up his boots.

"Don't say 'all right,' but go and tell him at once."

Slava was silent.

"Who's that with you?" Alia Sergeyevna's voice came again.

"Misha."

"Misha? Hello, Misha!"

"Good morning," Misha replied loudly.

"Misha, dear," Alia Sergeyevna said from her bed, "please don't let Slava go swimming. The doctors have categorically forbidden it."

Slava flushed and gave his laces a desperate tug.

"All right," Misha smiled.

"And, Misha!" Alia Sergeyevna continued, "keep an eye on him. I wouldn't have let him go if you were not going. You're a sensible boy and he listens to you."

"All right, I'll look after him," Misha replied, making a face at Slava.

Konstantin Alekseyevich came in carrying the tea-pot and a wire stand.

"Well, campers, how about some tea?" he said, putting the tea-pot on the table.

"Thank you, I've had my breakfast," Misha replied.

"Kostya," Alia Sergeyevna again called from the bedroom, "what are you doing there? Go and wake Dasha!"

"Never mind," Konstantin Alekseyevich said, cutting the bread, "everything's ready."

"Tell Dasha," Alia Sergeyevna continued, "to take only a pint when the milk-woman comes."

"All right, I'll tell her. Go to sleep again."

"How do you think I can sleep!" Alia Sergeyevna replied petulantly. "Oh, why did you agree to let him go? Now I'll have to worry two whole days. And I have a concert to-day."

"Never mind, let him go," Konstantin Alekseyevich said with a sly look at the boys. "You can't very well stop him now. He's almost grown-up."

"No, no ... it's madness, simply madness! To let a child go off to some strange place for two whole days, and for no sane reason.... Slava! Don't you dare run about barefoot."

"All right," Slava mumbled, finishing his tea.

"Well," Konstantin Alekseyevich asked Misha, a smile still lighting up his face, "what did you do with the vice I gave you?"

"We made good use of it," Misha said. "It's in the House of Pioneers; in the fitter's shop."

"What! Is the whole club using it?"

"Oh, no!" Misha laughed. "We collected tools from the whole district."

"You want me to believe that?"

"Ye-es. Why, in addition to the fitter's shop, we have a carpenter's shop, a sewing room, shoe-making and book-binding shops."

"Indeed! A whole combine!"



"Only you were stingy," Slava said slinging his haversack on his shoulder. "The director of the Napilnik Factory gave us a whole lathe."

"Is that so! But I haven't any lathes," Konstantin Alekseyevich raised his hands in mock dismay. "If you want one I can let you have a weaving-machine. I'll give you one as big as this room. You don't want it? I can't do anything about it, then. You're welcome to all I have."

"You're always joking," Slava said. "Let's go, Misha."

Konstantin Alekseyevich saw the boys to the door, and on parting he said laughingly:

"All the same, though you're independent young fellows, try I come home without fractured legs and arms, and, if you can manage it, with no heads broken."

## Chapter 48

### IN CAMP

Misha's group had finished making a big raft, had enjoyed a swim and were resting on the shore.

A big lake spread out before them. Clouds rested on the distant, indistinguishable shore like ragged snow-clad mountains. Sharp-winged gulls skimmed over the blue water. Thousands of tiny fish darted to and fro in the shallows. White water lilies dozed on the gently rocking wavelets. Their long green stalks were entwined with the reeds close to the shore, where the frogs were croaking, and from time to time one heard a sharp splash as a larger fish lashed out with its tail.

"The main thing is to get a good tan," said Genka with a preoccupied air, as he rubbed his chest and shoulders with ointment. "A tan's the first sign of good health. Here, Misha, rub it into my back and then I'll do yours."

Misha took the tin, sniffed at it and frowned in disgust.

"What's this muck? Phew!"

"A lot you know! It's nut-oil. The best there is. The smell comes from the tin. It's an old shoe-polish tin."

Misha continued his horrified inspection of the ointment.

"And there are bits of egg-shell and bread crumbs in it."

"That's nothing," Genka said shaking his head. "You see everything got mixed up in my haversack. Never mind, rub it in!"

"No!" Misha returned the tin to Genka. "Do it yourself. I wouldn't like to touch it."

"Don't then. You just see, I'll have a bronze tan by evening."

"Come on, fellows," Slava said. "Here's Nikolai."

The boys went over to the camp, to the peaked little grey tents pitched on the edge of the woods.

A flag-pole had already been fixed in the middle of the camp; the flag-raising ceremony was set for the next day. The children had trampled the newly turned earth round the pole and now it formed a little grey mound. All round the earth was brown, strewn with pine bark, pine needles and dry, crackling twigs.

The cries of girls bustling around the camp-fire came from a tent at the end of the camp. Pots slung on a pole fixed between two forked branches hung over the fire and a smell of burnt porridge quickly spread throughout the camp.

"What are they yelling about?" Genka said. "Girls can never do anything quietly. They have to raise a howl. There's nothing easier than cooking porridge—and they're fussing about as though they were roasting a bull."

Nikolai emerged from the woods surrounded by a gang of waifs—they were the lads who had regularly visited the playground. All were in rags, and Korovin alone was stripped to the waist.

"I wonder where Nikolai took them," Misha thought. "Of course, he went off with them on purpose while we were setting up the camp. They're not used to doing any work. While we were fixing things they'd have got tired of waiting and might even have made off. I wonder where he took them?"

"Where've you been?" Misha asked Korovin.

Korovin looked sideways at the boys standing by.

"To the village," he replied quietly.

"What for?"

"We looked at the grain, watched the threshing," he sighed. "We, too, used to... We had a cow."

Misha looked admiringly at Nikolai. Surrounded by the girls, he was standing near the camp-fire laughing and blowing on the spoonful of porridge he was tasting.

"How clever he is," Misha thought. "Took these fellows to the village. And with a purpose, too. All of them come from the village and he took them there to remind them of their homes and families."

"We went to the station as well," Korovin continued.

"Why?"

"There's an orphans' home there. We saw how the kids are living. They used to be..." he hesitated, "well, chaps like us."

"Did you like it?"

"Not bad. They've got their own kitchen garden."

"Nikolai took them there on purpose, too," thought Misha.

Nikolai continued to stand by the camp kitchen. Misha joined him.

"Oh, how am I going to share it all out?" Zina Kruglova was moaning plaintively. "There's a hundred different things here. No one brought the same as anyone else. Look," she pointed to the food arranged near the fire, "five rissoles, eight herrings, twelve eggs, nine slices of meat, four roach, macaroni, porridge, and things." She pouted and then suddenly burst out laughing, "And Group 2 caught a lot of fish—sixteen gudgeon." Her red, scorched face with its little snub nose grew completely round.

"The fish are rather small," Nikolai laughed, "but never mind, I'm sure we'll have a tasty dinner."

## Chapter 49

### THE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL

Dinner went off very well indeed.

The porridge smelt deliciously of smoke; so did the boiled roach; and pine needles, globules of fat, and bits of egg-shell floated in the tea.

All the children sat round the fire and ate with spoons made of birch bark. Nikolai straightened out a piece of wire, spread fragments of meat on it and roasted them. Each child got only a small piece, but they felt they had never tasted anything so wonderful.

After dinner Nikolai lined up the whole detachment.

"To-morrow we'll play a game of military manoeuvres with the children from the orphans' home; and to-day we'll do a little training so that we shan't disgrace ourselves. The Whiteguard headquarters will be there," he said, pointing to the woods on the right shore of the lake. "The plan is to get to the Whiteguard headquarters and capture their flag. The second and fourth groups will be the Whites, and their leader will be Shura Ogureyev, who will pretend to be Wrangel; Genka Petrov will be his chief-of-staff."

"Why should we be Whiteguards?" Genka protested. "Our group's Red, we should be Reds."

"That's right," Shura said. "It's not fair. What's more, the White-guards didn't have any chief-of-staff. He was called the quartermaster general."

"All right," Nikolai smiled, "that means Genka will be quartermaster general. Now see you carry out the orders. As soon as you hear the bugle, stop the game and return to camp."

Shura and Genka were terribly offended about the parts they had to play, and when the Whiteguard headquarters was captured, Wrangel and his quartermaster general disappeared.

The search for them went on for a long time, the bugle was blown several times, but they did not show themselves.

"Never mind," Nikolai said, "they'll turn up. Have your tea and then we'll go into the woods to gather dry branches for a big camp-fire."

Sure enough, Shura and Genka turned up in the evening.

Shura was in front and Genka dragged after him, his head bowed, and groaning and sighing as though he had just had a beating.

They shambled up and stood without a word a few paces from Nikolai.

"What do you want?" he asked them dryly.

"We're surrendering," Shura announced importantly.

"Why didn't you come when the signal was given?"

Shura began to make an obviously prepared speech.

"We decided to stick to the historical truth. Things have to be done the way they actually happened. Wrangel escaped from the Crimea, you know. Well, we too went into hiding." He paused, then added: "And if you think I've given a wrong interpretation of the role, then please don't make me play Wrangel any more."

Nikolai turned away to hide his smile.

"All right, but why have you come now?"

Shura pointed at Genka.

"My quartermaster general was taken dangerously ill."

The "quartermaster general" actually did look pretty miserable. He was shivering, his face had a feverish flush, and there were red rims round his eyes. His whole body twitched painfully as if someone were sticking needles into him.

"What's the matter, Genka?" Nikolai asked.

Genka made no reply.

"Serious damage to the skin," Shura replied loftily.

Nikolai pulled up Genka's shirt and revealed the fact that his whole back

was blistered.

"Did you smear yourself with anything?"

"Y-yes," Genka stammered.

"With what?"

"N-nut oil."

"Let's see it."

Genka winced painfully as he drew the tin from his pocket. He handed it to Nikolai.

"Where'd you get it from?" Nikolai asked after giving it a long inspection.

"M-made it myself... according to a recipe."

"What recipe?"

"Borka's."

"Huh! This is a mixture of zinc ointment and shoe-polish. A fine chemist *you* are!"

The unlucky boy was smeared with vaseline and put to bed in one of the tents.

## Chapter 50

### THE CAMP-FIRE

In the evening the entire detachment gathered round the camp-fire blazing away on the shore.

The moon threw 'a shimmering silver path across the lake. The little tents stood white against the black density of the sleeping woods. Only the twinkling stars, signalling as it were to each other, kept watch over the slumbering earth.

Nikolai told the children about distant, foreign lands; about the little children working in the tea plantations of Ceylon; about the beggars dying in the streets of Bombay; about the toil-worn miners of Silesia, and about the Negroes of the United States of America who are deprived of all human rights.

The leaping fire threw a dancing light on the tense faces of the children, their red ties, Nikolai's lean face and the lock of soft hair that lay across his pale forehead. The thin branches crackled and broke up into small red coals that burned with a small violet flame. Sometimes a hot cinder would pop out of the fire and one of the children would carefully push it back among the white-hot blazing wood.

Nikolai also told them about the Communists in capitalist countries, about the gallant soldiers of the world revolution.

Misha lay on his stomach with his chin cupped in his hands. His face glowed from close proximity to the fire, while his back and legs were cooled by the breeze coming from the lake. As he listened to Nikolai the resolute faces of fearless men and women rose before him in the darkness which encircled the fire. He pictured these people going to their execution or

courageously enduring torture in prisons and torture-chambers. He had a strong feeling that he wanted to do something heroic and he dreamed of leading a life like the men Nikolai was talking about, of serving the Revolution to his last dying breath....

Nikolai stopped speaking and ordered lights out. The drawn-out notes of the bugle stirred the air and echoed in the distance over the tops of the trees. The children dispersed to their tents. The camp slept.

But Misha did not sleep. He lay at the side of the tent and watched the stars through the open flap. Long-legged Shura Bolshoi was stretched out beside him, his blanket pulled over his head. Next to him slept Slava who had his knees doubled up and was snuffling lightly. Then there was Genka, tossing and groaning in his sleep. The children lay on soft fir branches, their faces buried in grass pillows.

Misha thought of Nikolai. How did he come to know everything? He must be doing a lot of reading. But how could he find the time for everything? He was working at a factory and studying at a workers' faculty; he was a Young Pioneer leader, and a member of the bureau of the Komsomol cell at the factory. Yes he was a real Young Communist!

A branch cracked. Misha listened attentively. It was only the sentries. Low, muffled laughter came from the girls' tent. Most likely that was Zina Kruglova. Everything was funny to her....

For some reason he thought of Elena and Igor. He hadn't seen them for a long time, almost the whole summer. Where were they now, those wandering acrobats? Where was their donkey and cart? Thoughts of the cart never left Genka's mind; he wanted a cart like that to carry advertisements round the town and so get a free pass to the cinema. Odd chap!

Misha could just imagine Genka pulling the cart round Moscow. Suddenly an idea struck him.

A cart... cart.... Why hadn't he seen it before! Misha sat up in his excitement, then lay down again. What a grand idea! It would be simply smashing! He saw the whole picture clearly before him. By Jove, that's great!

He wanted to wake Genka and Slava to share his plan with them, but changed his mind and decided to wait till the morning. The main thing now was to find the Bushes and then... Misha could not fall asleep for a long time, pondering over his wonderful plan.

At last his eyes closed. The steps of the sentries faded, the laughter in the girls' tents ceased, and everything was still.

The dying embers of the camp-fire left a black spot on the high moon-lit shore. For a long time tiny sparks glowed and faded alternately in the black ash, as though playing hide-and-seek among the burnt, charred logs.

## Chapter 51

### MYSTERIOUS PREPARATIONS

August was coming to an end. The chilly boulevards were wrapped more closely in bright carpets of fallen leaves. The air was steeped in the soft scents of the departing summer.

One day, after a Young Pioneer meeting, Misha, Genka, and Slava left the club and went to the Novodevichy Monastery.

Jackdaws nested in the cracks of the high monastery wall. Their loud cries filled the deserted cemetery. The cheerless grass on the graves had withered and yellowed, and the metal railings quivered with every sharp gust of wind.

"We'll have to wait," Misha said.

The friends sat down on a low bench which rested on two tottering supports and sagged almost to the ground.

"Half of the people here were buried alive," Genka announced, eyeing the graves.

"Why do you say that?" Slava asked.

"Well, it sometimes happens that a person who is thought to be dead is actually only in a lethargic sleep. He wakes up and finds himself in the grave. Try and get out then to prove you're alive."

"It does happen, but very seldom," Misha said.

"On the contrary. All too often," Genka objected. "You have to pass an electric current through the body, then you won't make a mistake."

"A new theory by Professor Genka Petrov," Misha announced.

"Reception hours from two to four," Slava added.

"Go on, laugh," said Genka. "You'll know all about it when you're buried alive. You'll laugh the other side of your faces then!" He said no more, feeling very much offended. Then, changing the subject, he asked impatiently, "When are they coming?"

"They'll come," Misha replied. "They promised, so they won't fail us."

"Maybe it'd be better not to start the whole business?" Slava said with a look at his friends.

"Why?"

"We can go to the militia and tell them everything."

"Are you mad!" Genka said angrily. "And let the militia get all the treasure and leave us right out of it?"

"We can always tell the militia," Misha said. "But first we've got to find out everything, otherwise we'll look ridiculous."

Misha had hardly finished speaking, when Elena and Igor appeared from the outside of the monastery wall. They greeted the boys and sat down beside them on the bench.

Elena was in an autumn coat and wore a bright coloured kerchief.

Igor was in a suit, collar, and tie, and a smart cap, looking grave as always.

"I think we're on time," he said in a broken bass as he made himself comfortable and pulled out a pocket watch.

Elena smiled at the boys.

"Well, and how are you getting along?"

"All right," Misha replied. "And you?"

"We're all right, too. We've just returned from a tour."  
 "Where've you been?"  
 "Oh, different places. Kursk, and Oryol, and the Caucasus...."  
 "The Caucasus is a capital place!" Genka said. "Apricots grow there."  
 "You seem to know everything," Slava remarked.  
 "Well, what about it?" Misha asked, turning to Igor.  
 "We've arranged everything," Igor said.  
 "Yes," Elena confirmed. "We've arranged everything. You can have it. But what do you need it for? It's all broken."  
 "And the tyres are rotten," Igor said.  
 "That's not important," Misha replied, "we'll repair it."  
 "But what do you need the cart for?" Elena asked.  
 "Well—we want to do something," Misha replied evasively.  
 "Do you know, boys," Elena said suddenly, "I'm sure you're hunting treasure."  
 The boys looked at Elena in round-eyed confusion.  
 "Why d'you think so?" Misha said, reddening.  
 The girl laughed.  
 "It's easy to guess just by looking at you."  
 "Why?"  
 "Do you want to know why?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Because people hunting treasure always look terribly stupid."  
 "You've guessed wrong," Genka replied, "we're not looking for any treasure. You should realize that of all people wouldn't worry over such trifles."  
 "But—seriously, joking apart, when can we have the cart and how much must we pay?" Misha asked.  
 "You can have it any time you like," Elena said, "and you needn't pay anything. The circus doesn't need it any longer."  
 "It's been written off by the book-keeping department," Igor added gravely. He rose and looked at his watch: "Elena, it's time to go."  
 The boys saw the bushes to the tram. Near the stop the kiosk salesman was stamping his feet and rubbing his freezing hands. His cap, with the name of the co-operative he worked for printed on it in gilt letters, was pulled over his ears. The boys bought some sweets from him and invited Elena and Igor to have some. A tram then took them on their way and the boys walked home along Bolshaya Tsaritsynskaya Street, across Devichye Polye.

## Chapter 53

### THE CART

In the deserted square the autumn wind frolicked with the withered leaves.



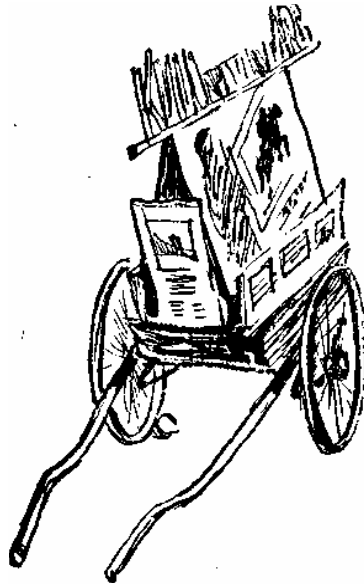
It caught them in a heap, whipped them round the bare trees, and tossed them against the granite steps of the church; it pitched them over the solitary benches, hurled them under the feet of pedestrians, and carried them in crumpled confusion along Ostozhenka Street where it rammed them under the wheels of a hand-cart with bright advertisements which stood at the corner of a small turning.

Two sheets of plywood were joined on the cart forming a triangle; on them were posters advertising a new film—*Brigade Commander Ivanov*. Letters, cut out of plywood and spelling the words " 'Art' Cinema House," were fixed precariously along the top where the boards met.

Pedestrians passing regularly along the street had become used to seeing the cart which had already been standing at the corner for four days. The bald old stamp dealer stormed at the lad who daily set the cart outside his shop, but the boy never replied; he merely put a stone against one of the wheels, and calmly walked away.

One evening the boy kicked the stone from under the wheel, trundled the cart into a back-yard and went to the janitor's quarters.

He found the janitor, a thin red-headed Tatar, sitting on a double bed, his bare feet on the floor.



"Uncle," the boy said, "my cart's broken down. May I leave it in the yard?"

"What, again?" the janitor said, lazily looking out of the window, "not again?" He yawned, patting his lips with the palm of his hand. "All right, leave it ... it won't do any harm."

The boy went back into the yard, carefully looked over the cart, touched the top support, lightly tapped the board, and went away.

The court-yard emptied. Lights went out in the windows. When it was quite dark the old stamp dealer and Filin emerged from a backdoor. They stopped quite close to the cart.

"So everything's decided?" the old man whispered. "Yes," Filin replied irritably. "He can't wait any longer. You've been leading him up the garden a whole year."

"The code's complicated," the old man muttered, "a lethory by the look of it. Try reading it without the key."

"If only you knew what was written there," Filin hissed, bending close to the old man, "you'd read it fast enough."

"I understand. But what can I do!" the old man said, throwing out his hands. "I can't do the impossible! Perhaps Valeri Sigizmundovich will wait a little longer. It'd be better to wait a bit."

"He doesn't want to wait any longer. Have you got that into your head? He doesn't want to. See everything's ready by Sunday. I shan't come myself; I'll send the boy."



Filin went away and the old man stood looking after him for a long time, his toothless mouth working. Finally, he shuffled back through the door. His bent figure showed in a lighted window. He was moving slowly about the kitchen. He bent over the primus-stove, and long tongues of flame flared round the kettle, licking its sloping sides.

Then the old man began peeling potatoes. He worked slowly and methodically, the peel growing longer and longer and finally dropping into a bucket. He then left the kitchen.

In his living-room the old man bent over the table as if examining something. He remained in that position for some time, then raised his head and looked out of the window, in front of which stood the cart, and began to draw the curtain. He did this with one hand, in the other he held a sheath. It could be seen very distinctly. Black, made of leather, with a metal border at the top, ending in a little ball....

The janitor came out, scratched his head as he looked at the moon, yawned, and walked to the gates. Genka and Slava appeared just as he was

about to close them.

"Take your cart," the janitor said. "I don't see anything wrong with it. Take it away."

The boys pushed out the stones from under the wheels and trundled the cart out into the street. The janitor locked the gates....

Genka and Slava pulled it into a deserted turning, moved away the upper support and separated the two boards. Out sprang Misha.

Misha returned home late that night. Mother was away working on the night shift.

He undressed and went to bed, where he lay with his eyes wide open and pondered hard.

This business with the cart had been a grand idea! Every day for a whole week they had kept the stamp shop under observation. Whenever the old man came to the door to see off any of his clients, he always stopped to chat with them near the cart, never for a moment suspecting that anyone was in it. At night they had kept the cart in the yard and in this way they had learned the habits of the old man. They had seen the sheath, too, several times. It opened like a fan when the metal border was taken off and the ball unscrewed. And there was some writing on the fan. The only thing he could not understand was why the old man had told Filin he could not decode the writing without a key. The key was in the sheath! What was he trying to decode then?

The thing now was to get the sheath and find out everything. The stranger was called Valeri Sigizmundovich, and it was clear that he was Nikitsky. True, they had not seen him again, but the important thing now was to get the sheath. Misha was sure Nikitsky could be found later. It would all be easier now. They could easily fool Borka. The cart could be used as a decoy-duck; he'd had an eye on it for a long time now.

They'd have to part with the cart, of course. True, they had been getting passes to the cinema for carrying the advertisements, but the school term started on Monday, and they'd have no time for the cinema anyway. And it wasn't the sort of job for Young Pioneers to be doing.

Misha's thoughts turned to the affairs of the detachment. Children's Communist Week was approaching, and their detachment had to write a letter to the Young Pioneers in Chemnitz, Germany. Socialist-traitors like Scheidemann and Noske had become quite overbearing.

Then he had a little bone to pick with Zina Kruglova. The girls were behind with their sewing for the children's homes. True, at the Young Pioneer meeting it had been decided that the sewing should be done by both boys and girls, that no difference should be made between male and female labour, but—it was better to let the girls do the sewing.

## Chapter 53

## THE SHEATH

Borka whistled gaily as he walked down the narrow turning, carrying a neatly tied package in his hand. Borka did not idle on the way. His father had told him not to stop anywhere but to bring the package safely home.

This order would have been carried out to the letter if Borka's attention had not been attracted by the cart with the "Art" Cinema posters. It was standing near the churchyard with Misha, Genka, Slava, and Korovin round it. They were examining the cart and engaged in a heated argument.

Borka walked over, curious to know what the boys were doing.

"Take the tyres alone," Misha was saying, kicking the wheel with his foot as Borka came up, "they're worth a good price any day."

"I've named my price!" Korovin sniffed.

"Aw! Chuck it!" Genka exclaimed. "Five roubles for such a cart!"

"Are you selling the cart?" Borka moved closer to the boys.

"Yes. What's it to you?" Misha said, swinging round.

"I just wanted to know. Can't I ask?"

"Get out! Don't waste our time."

"I might buy it!"

"All right. Buy it!"

"How much are you asking?"

"Ten roubles."

Borka squatted and began inspecting the cart. He put the package on the ground and felt the tyres.

"Here, take your hands off," Misha said, seizing the shafts. "The wheels are on ball-bearings. Look how smoothly they run." He pushed the cart. "Hear that?"

Borka moved along with the cart, listening to the hum of the wheels with the air of an expert.

"It runs by itself. Try it," Misha offered.

Borka gripped the shafts and pushed the cart. It certainly moved easily.

Genka and Slava also followed the cart, carefully screening Korovin, who was sitting near the package.

"And here's the chief attraction." Misha took the top support off and moved the plywood sheets aside. "See that? You can even sleep there."

"You're just boosting it up," said Borka. "The rubber's all worn."

"What? Use your eyes and read: 'Treugolnik Works, first grade'."

"What do I care what's written. The paint's coming off it. Make it cheaper."

"All right, Misha," Korovin called suddenly. He was still sitting near Borka's package. "I'll take the cart."

Misha's enthusiasm to have Borka buy it quickly evaporated.

"That's good. Take it.... You've lost your chance, Skinfint!"

"I might give a higher price."

"Not now, you won't."

"Why?" Borka went up to his package and picked it up.

"Wouldn't you like to know!" Misha grinned.

Borka looked at the boys, puzzled. They were all sniggering at him; only Korovin was grave as usual.

"Oh well, if you don't want to," Borka said. "Only don't come running to me afterwards. I wouldn't give you twenty kopeks for it."

He went away whistling.

When he had turned the corner the boys went behind the church and Korovin pulled the sheath out of his pocket.

Misha snatched it excitedly, turned it over in his hand, then carefully removed the border and unscrewed the ball.

The sheath unfolded like a fan. For a minute the boys stared at it, and then exchanged surprised looks....

The inside of the sheath had dots, dashes, and circles written out in tables. Exactly like those on the scroll in the dirk.

That was all.





## Part V

### GRADE SEVEN

#### Chapter 54

#### AUNTIE BROSHA

When Alexandra Sergeyevna, the mathematics teacher, entered the classroom and began the lesson she found that there was no chalk.

"Monitor, why isn't there any chalk?" she asked Misha sternly.

"Isn't there?" Misha sprang up from his desk, his eyes wide open in feigned surprise. "There was some before the lesson began."

"Well, I never! So it's run away. Fetch it back." Misha dashed out of the classroom and ran to the cloak-room for the chalk. There he found Auntie Brosha, the attendant, weeping.

"Why, what's the matter, Auntie Brosha?" Misha asked, looking at her searchingly. "What're you crying for? Who's upset you?"

No one in the school knew exactly why she was called Auntie Brosha. Perhaps it was her real name, perhaps she got the name because of the big yellow brooch that was always pinned to her striped blouse, under her chin, or perhaps she really did look like a brooch—she was such a small, plump old woman. Auntie Brosha, with the sock she was always knitting, was a fixture in the cloakroom. It was said she could charm away sties. She would look into your eyes, mumble something and in two days the sty would be gone.

And here was Auntie Brosha sitting by the cloak-room, crying.

"Tell me who's upset you?" Misha pleaded.

Auntie Brosha wiped her eyes with her handkerchief and sighed.

"I've worked here thirty years and never a bad word! Now I'm a foolish old woman, they say. That's all the thanks I get."

"Who? Who said it?"

"I'll have nothing more to do with him," said Auntie Brosha, indifferently. "Nothing."

"That's neither here nor there!" Misha said angrily. "No one has the right to insult you. Who insulted you?"

"Yura Stotsky. He came in late and I'm ordered not to let in late-comers. Go to the headmaster, I told him, he won't eat you. And he called me an old fool! He has good parents. His mother used to come here when it was a secondary school. Only Misha, my child," she whispered anxiously, "please don't tell anyone!"

But Misha was no longer listening. He seized the chalk and ran up the stairs three at a time.

Filya Kitov, nicknamed Kit, (*Kit—whale—Tr*) was sweating at the blackboard. Alexandra Sergeyevna's silence was ominous. While proving the equality of the angles in an isosceles triangle he had multiplied the square of the hypotenuse by the sum of the squares of the sides and now he was staring at the blackboard, taken aback by the result. This was Kit's second year in the seventh grade, and it was quite probable that he would find himself there a third year. He was always dreaming in class or hacking at his desk with a penknife, and he was such a glutton that he always cadged what he could from his classmates during break, and not at all because he was hungry.

"Go on!" Alexandra Sergeyevna said in a voice that told him plainly he could expect nothing but trouble. Kit looked imploringly at the class. "Look at the blackboard," said Alexandra Sergeyevna. Kit again showed the class his fat helpless back and the bewildered tuft of hair on the crown of his tow-coloured head.

Alexandra Sergeyevna walked between the desks, looking severely at the children. She was small and thin, wore her hair piled high on her head, and had a long powdered nose. She noticed everything and never forgave the slightest misdemeanour. When her back was turned Zina Kruglova raised her hand, her fingers apart, to show the class how many minutes were left before the bell rang.

Yura Stotsky's desk was near the wall and he was staring vacantly out of the window.

Misha threw an indignant glance at Yura. "Miserable braggart! Goes around with bare knees to show he can stand the cold. Imagines he's Pechorin. (*Pechorin is the central figure in *A Hero of Our Times*, a novel by Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841), the great Russian poet. In speaking of him*)

And that's what he wrote in the inquiry form: 'I want to be like Pechorin.' I'll give him Pechorin when the lesson's over!"

Misha cautiously tore a page out of his exercise-book and, shielding it with his palm, wrote: "Yura Stotsky called Brosha a fool. Brosha's crying. We'll have to call a meeting to discuss it." The letters were awry for he kept

his eyes on the blackboard as he wrote. He pushed the note across to Slava. Slava read it and nodded in agreement. Misha folded the paper, wrote, "To Shura Ogureyev and Genka Petrov," and threw it on to the next desk.

Shura read it, pondered for a moment and wrote: "It would be better to put him on trial and show him up. I'll be prosecutor." He refolded the note and threw it to the Nekrasov sisters, but Alexandra Sergeyevna sensed something going on behind her back and turned her head quickly. All the children were sitting quietly except Zina Kruglova who just managed to lower her hand, her fingers outstretched.

"Kruglova, go to the blackboard," Alexandra Sergeyevna said.

Kit slowly returned to his desk.

The Nekrasov sisters passed the note to Lyolya Podvolotskaya, who handed it to Genka. He read it and wrote, "Have to teach him a lesson he will remember."

The note returned to Misha by the same route. He read Shura's and Genka's answers and showed them to Slava. He then took the note back and had just started writing on it when Slava kicked him under the desk. Misha paid no attention. Slava gave him another kick, but it was too late. Alexandra Sergeyevna was already standing over him and holding her hand out for the note.

"What are you writing?" the author has in mind his egoism, scepticism, and contempt for other people.

Misha crumpled the paper in his hand and silently rose from his seat.

"Show me what you have in your hand!"

Misha did not reply, but kept his eyes fixed on the board nailed to the wall for pinning up diagrams.

"What were you writing during the lesson?" Alexandra Sergeyevna asked softly. She noticed a book under Misha's exercise-books and picked it up. "What are you doing with this?" she asked and read out the title to the whole class. *"History, Descriptions and Drawings of Side Arms from Ancient Times to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century"*. Why are you reading books that have nothing to do with the lesson?"

"I wasn't reading it. I just had it on my desk," Misha pleaded.

"And I suppose you weren't writing notes? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're the class monitor, a Young Pioneer, and a member of the school committee. You will get this book back from the headmaster and, in the meantime, leave the room."

Misha looked straight in front of him as he went out of the class-room.

## Chapter 55

### CLASS MEETING

Misha sat on the window-sill in the corridor. The window gave out on to the snow-covered school playground and Krivoarbatsky lane. Although it



was still early, two street-lamps on the opposite side of the lane were already burning.

It was quiet in the corridor. Misha heard water dripping into a pail placed under the boiling water container, and the piano being played in the gym on the floor above him, tram-tam, tara-tara, tram-ta-ta, tram-ta-ta, and the measured tramp of feet, tram-ta-ta, tram-ta-ta....

He was in a fix, no doubt about that! Aleksei Ivanovich, the headmaster, was sure to ask about the book when he went to see him.... He'd want to know the whys and wherefores.... And you couldn't hide anything from him. He always dragged out the whole truth. His eyes seemed to bore right through you!

And all because of that sneak Yura. Definitely *a* bourgeois type.

The bell rang and the silence was broken by the slamming of doors, stamping of feet, shouts and laughter.

Yura Stotsky came out of the class-room.

"Why did you insult Auntie Brosha?" Misha asked, stopping him.

"That's none of your business," Yura said with a contemptuous air.

"Take that smug look off your face, or I'll teach you how to behave!" ' Their classmates surrounded them.

"We don't like your habit of insulting the attendants, got that?" Misha continued. "You're not at home here. They aren't servants to be shouted at."

"Don't waste your time talking, Misha," Genka said, pushing his way through the crowd of boys and girls standing around Yura. "Here's how you should deal with him!"

He lunged at Yura but Misha held him back.

"Stop it. Listen, Stotsky," he said to Yura. "You've got to apologize to Auntie Brosha."

"What?" Yura raised his thin eyebrows in surprise. "You think I'm going to apologize to a cleaner?"

"Yes."

"I don't think so!" Yura sneered.

"We'll make you," Misha said firmly. "And if you won't I'll raise the question at the class meeting."

"I don't care a hang for your class meeting."

"That's where you're wrong!"

"We'll see about that!"

"We'll see alright!"

German was the last lesson that day, but before it started Genka rushed into the class-room and shouted:

"Hooray! Alma hasn't come to-day. You can pack up your books!"

"Wait," Misha stopped him and, turning to the class, cried out, "Quiet. We're going to hold our class meeting now."

"What a fag!" Genka drawled glumly. "We could have gone home two hours earlier."

"As though we couldn't have a meeting some other time," Lyolya Podvolotskaya grumbled. She was a tall, pretty girl with blond hair.

"Misha's always thinking of something," Shura said.

"I'm not going to stay for any meeting," Kit announced. "I'm hungry."

"You'll stay. You're always hungry. We're going to have a meeting, and that's that," Misha said, shutting the door.

They all returned to their desks.

"We're going to discuss Yura Stotsky," Misha announced. "Genka Petrov will tell you what's happened."

Genka rose and began speaking, punctuating his words with gestures.

"Yura Stotsky has disgraced our class. He called Auntie Brosha an old fool. It's a scandal! We're not living in tsarist days. If it were the headmaster he'd have been afraid to call him that, but Auntie Brosha's only the school cleaner, so she can be insulted. Is that it? It's high time these lordly airs were dropped. In any case the scouts support the bourgeoisie and I propose that we get Stotsky expelled from the school."

Then Slava got up. He thought for a moment, then said:

"It's time Stotsky began to reconsider his attitude. He's an individualist and keeps aloof from the rest of the class. It's no use his trying to imitate Pechorin. Pechorin is a product of the decay of the society of the nobility. Everyone knows that. Yura must apologize to Auntie Brosha; as for expelling him, I think that's being too severe."

Lyolya Podvolotskaya raised her hand.

"I don't see why the Young Pioneers are attacking Yura," she said heatedly. "Genka's a thousand times more of a hooligan and yet he's a Young Pioneer. It's not fair. First of all we've got to hear Yura out. Perhaps nothing of the sort happened."

Stotsky did not get up from his desk. He looked out of the window and said:

"In the first place I'm not a scout any more. Genka ought to keep his trap shut about things he doesn't know. And he's not the headmaster to go about expelling people. He takes too many liberties. Secondly, I don't agree that the cloak-room should be closed. That restricts our freedom. Thirdly, I don't intend giving anyone an account of my conduct. I shan't apologize, and I don't intend humiliating myself before every cleaner I meet. You can decide anything you like."

Shura Ogureyev took the floor. He went to the teacher's desk, faced the class, and said:

"Comrades. We have to look much deeper into the incident with Brosha. What's the position, comrades? There are two facts. First: that a woman was insulted, which is intolerable. Second: that the word 'fool' was used. Words like that contaminate our language, our great, vigorous, splendid language, as Nekrasov said...."

"Not Nekrasov. Turgenev," Misha corrected him.

"No," Shura said authoritatively, "Nekrasov said it first and Turgenev repeated it. You ought to read more, then you'll know. I propose we prohibit the use of this and similar words."

Shura was pleased with his speech. He walked back to his desk and sat down with an important air.

"Who else wants to speak?" Misha asked, and, seeing that Zina Kruglova

could not make up her mind, said, "Speak up, Zina. What are you afraid of?" Zina rose.

"Girls," she said, speaking quickly, "this is terrible! I saw Auntie Brosha crying. Yura doesn't deserve defending. And if Lyolya likes him, she should say so. Then Shura. He spoke very nicely about women, but during lessons he writes notes to the girls. That isn't right, either.... Then I'd like to say something about Genka Petrov. He always makes me laugh during lessons," Zina burst out laughing and sat down.

Misha was the last to speak.

"Stotsky insulted Auntie Brosha," he said, "because he considers himself above her. But what's so wonderful about him? Nothing. Auntie Brosha has worked in the school for thirty years and is performing a useful service to society, while Yura is still dependent on his father, has never done a lick of work in his life, and yet he's already insulting people who work. I propose that Yura Stotsky apologize to Auntie Brosha and if he doesn't want to, then the question will go before the school committee. Let the whole school judge his conduct."

The meeting decided that Stotsky was to apologize to Auntie Brosha.

## Chapter 56

### LETHORY

After the meeting Misha went to the headmaster's room.

Aleksei Ivanovich was sitting at his desk turning over the pages of a book; it was the one Alexandra Sergeyevna had taken from Misha. When Misha came in, the headmaster indicated a sofa and said, "Sit down."

Misha sat down.

"What were you discussing at your meeting?" the headmaster asked.

Misha told him.

"A decision is only the beginning. You have to see to it that Stotsky apologizes and make him realize where he is at fault."

Aleksei Ivanovich paused.

"You, Young Pioneers," he continued, "confine your activities to your detachment. That isn't quite correct. Your main work should be in school." He paused again. "Was your own conduct discussed at the meeting?"

"I don't understand what you mean." Misha flushed.

"Reading books that have nothing to do with the lesson and writing notes."

"I wasn't reading it. It just lay on my desk. But I did write the note.

"Tell me, Polyakov," Aleksei Ivanovich said, scrutinizing Misha's face, "why are you interested in side arms?"

"For the fun of it," Misha replied, his eyes fixed on the floor.

"And then," Aleksei Ivanovich went on as though he had not heard Misha, "you and your friends are interested in codes. That is all very well, but tell

me, what do you want it for?"

Misha did not reply. Aleksei Ivanovich pretended not to notice his silence, and continued:

"Your hobby may be very interesting, but does it achieve the desired result? If everything goes along well then continue, but if it doesn't, let me know. Perhaps I can help."

Misha thought quickly. Should he show him the scroll? They had been at it for two months now and were not making any headway. The dirk and the sheath had the same signs and Misha and his friends could not make out where the key was. That meant Polevoy thought the key to the code was in the sheath and Nikitsky thought it was in the dirk. Actually neither the dirk nor the sheath had the key. Perhaps the best thing would be to show the headmaster. If Aleksei Ivanovich could not read it then nobody could.

Misha sighed, pulled out of his pocket the scroll from the handle of the dirk, and gave it to Aleksei Ivanovich.

"It's this, Aleksei Ivanovich. We can't decode it. I believe it's a lethory, but we don't know what a lethory is."



"Yes," Aleksei Ivanovich said, inspecting the plate, "this does look like a lethory. I'll explain what it is. It is a cryptogram which was used in ancient Russian chronicles. There were two kinds: simple and difficult. The simple one was also called the 'gibber' alphabet, from here we have the word 'gibberish.' It was a fairly simple code. The letters of the alphabet were written in two rows: the top letters were used for the bottom ones and the bottom letters for the top

ones. The difficult lethory was a more complicated code. The entire alphabet was divided into three groups. The first group was substituted by dots. For instance 'a'—one dot, 'b'—two dots, and so on. The second group was substituted by dashes. For instance 'o'—one dash, 'm'—two dashes, and so on. And, finally, the third group was substituted by circles. One circle for the first letter in the group, two for the second, and so on. These signs were written in columns. Now do you understand?"

"Oh, but that's very easy," Misha said. "Now I understand how the scroll

ought to be read."

"No, " Aleksei Ivanovich said, "it would have been easy if there had been ten signs to each column on this scroll, but the largest number of signs in the columns here is five."

Aleksei Ivanovich fell silent, then said slowly:

"If this is a lethory, then you only have half the text. The other half must be somewhere else."

## Chapter 57

### A STRANGE INSCRIPTION

So *that* was the whole trouble! Misha felt for the sheath in his pocket. Now he realized why the old stamp dealer had not been able to decode the signs.

"The second half of the text must be somewhere," Aleksei Ivanovich repeated with a look of inquiry at Misha.

Well, come what may! Misha pulled out the sheath, took the rim off, opened it like a fan, and laid it silently on the desk.

"I see you believe in being cautious," Aleksei Ivanovich said with a laugh.

He put the two tables together, and only now did Misha see that one had a convex end and the other a concave end, showing where they should be joined. Why hadn't he noticed that before?

After fitting the two tables together Aleksei Ivanovich spread them out on his desk and put a paper-weight on them.

"You see," he said to Misha, "we have a ten-sign lethory. Now we can try and read it."

He got up and went to the bookcase, took down a book and laid it on his desk, then studiously turned over the pages.

"Here it is," Aleksei Ivanovich said, closing the book over two fingers. "Get a pencil and paper and take down what I say."

Misha took up a pencil, put a sheet of paper in front of him, and waited.

"Write, V. Have you got that? T, 'n', 'd', 't', 'h', V. What does that make?"

"'Wind the'," Misha read.

"Good," Aleksei Ivanovich noted. " 'Ñ', Ò, V, 'c', 'k'. What have you written?"

" 'Clock'," Misha replied.

Letter by letter Misha wrote the following: "Wind the clock with this reptile. The tower will turn by itself at the stroke of twelve."

"A strange inscription," Aleksei Ivanovich said thoughtfully, "strange." He inspected the sheath silently, then looked at Misha.

"What have you to say about it?" Misha shrugged his shoulders.

"At any rate you know more than I do," Aleksei Ivanovich continued. "For instance: where is the dagger?"

Misha stared at the floor.

"There is no rose without a thorn," Aleksei Ivanovich laughed. "Since there is a sheath, there must be a dagger."

Misha took the dirk out and showed how the scroll folded into it.

"Clever. It's like a dirk."

"But it is a dirk," Misha said.

Aleksei Ivanovich raised his eyebrows.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course."

"I'm glad to hear it," Aleksei Ivanovich said, inspecting the dirk. "A handle with a secret—they were very common in the Middle Ages. Well, this bronze snake *is* apparently the reptile in question. Consequently only the clock is missing. Now, Polyakov, tell me everything you know about this dirk."

After Misha had finished his story Aleksei Ivanovich drummed his fingers on the desk for a few minutes.

"All this is very interesting. I remember the sinking of the *Empress Maria* very well. The papers raised a noise about it at the time and I think that was about all. But this is really interesting. Nikitsky knew he could not kill a man with impunity. He counted on the explosion to cover up everything. Obviously he knew that the ship was going to be blown up."

Misha looked at Aleksei Ivanovich in surprise. He was right! Why hadn't he thought of it? That meant Nikitsky had something to do with the explosion.

"What do you intend doing now?" Aleksei Ivanovich asked.

"I really don't know," Misha replied. "We thought that after we'd decoded the writing everything would be clear; but it seems we were wrong." He looked inquiringly at Aleksei Ivanovich. "We have to find out who the murdered officer was."

"That is right. Polevoy, of course, told you this officer's name."

"Yes, but only his first name: Vladimir. He didn't know his surname. True. . ." Misha faltered.

"What were you going to say?"

"The fellows and I found out something about the dirk—"

"Did some investigating?"

"Yes."

"Good," Aleksei Ivanovich rose. "I shall ask you to come to see me in a few days' time and you will tell me about your investigations."

## Chapter 58

### THE WALL NEWSPAPER

The boys told Nikolai Sevostyanov about Yura Stotsky.

He approved of their conduct and told them there was a plan to have a Young Pioneer detachment in every school to unite all the Young Pioneers.

Among other things he advised them to publish a wall newspaper in their group.

Some days later the first issue of the wall newspaper, which they called *The Fighting Sheet*, was posted on the wall in the corridor near the classroom. The newspaper began with an item by Misha under the heading *An Unhealthy Attraction*.

### AN UNHEALTHY ATTRACTION

Some of our classmates are unhealthily attracted by people like Pechorin and Mary Pickford.

Let us begin with Mary Pickford. Every film she acts in ends with her marrying a millionaire. Why try to imitate her when everyone knows there are no millionaires in our country.



Now about Pechorin.

In the first place he was a nobleman.

Secondly, he was an egoist. He made everyone suffer because of it: he ruined Bella, betrayed Mary (true she was a princess, but Pechorin was a nobleman), and looked down on Maxim Maximovich.

Pechorin does not even conceal his egoism. He says: "I am not concerned with human misery or happiness." That means he has no respect for society and he is interested only in himself. From this we may conclude that a man who is not useful to society is harmful to it, because he disregards other people (this is illustrated by the case we recently discussed in our class). It is clear, therefore, that if everyone copies Pechorin and thinks only of himself we shall all be at each other's throats and will have pure capitalism.

*Polyakov*

This was followed by other items:

### DAMAGE TO FURNITURE

Some pupils like to carve their desks with knives. Kitov is especially keen on this, apparently thinking he has a piece of sausage in front of him. It is about time damage to school furniture was stopped. People who hack at the desks are adding to the ruin around them.

*Awl*

#### WHERE IS JUSTICE?

Our school has its own circle for studying the theatre and cinema. The chairman is Shura Ogureyev, the greatest actor of our time. The circle is now six months old, but it has yet to have its first meeting. For all that, Shura has a free pass to the cinema and theatre. He goes regularly and does not let anyone else use the pass. Where is the justice of it?

*Spectator*

#### THE LONG BREAK

Certain pupils try to remain in the class-room during the long break (we shall not mention names as everyone knows this concerns G. Petrov). By so doing they prevent the class-room from being ventilated and criminally use up oxygen, which is in short supply anyway. It's high time this stopped. And whoever wants to crib, let him crib in the corridor.

*Sharpeyes*

#### NICKNAMES

The pupils in our class like to give nicknames to one another and to the teachers. Time to stop this survival of the old type of school. The nickname lowers one's dignity.

*Eldarov*

The entire school read *The Fighting Sheet*, and laughed and said that the note about Pechorin and Mary Pickford referred to Yura Stotsky and Lyolya Podvolotskaya.

Yura sneered contemptuously when he read the item, and several days later another item appeared next to the wall newspaper. It read:

#### WHO IS AN EGOIST?

*(A message from the nether world)*

Gentlemen,

I am Grigori Alexandrovich Pechorin. A pupil of the seventh grade named Mikhail Polyakov has disturbed my peaceful slumbers. I arose from my grave and for two weeks my invisible spirit was present in the class-room. Here is my reply.

Polyakov asserts that I am an egoist. Let us assume he is right. But how



about Polyakov? He swots late every night to be first in the class. Why? To show that he is better and cleverer than all the others. And that is why he has undertaken various jobs in the school. He is group leader, monitor, member of the school committee, and member -of the editorial board.

The question is: which of us is the egoist?

*Pechorin*

This item infuriated Misha. There was not a grain of truth in it! He did not swot; and was it egoism if he studied hard and was an apt pupil? Everyone knew you had to study hard. Yura, too, was quite a good pupil, only his father always encouraged him by buying him something whenever he received good marks. And then, was it Misha's fault if he had been elected monitor and a member of the school committee?

"There, you see," Genka said to him, "see what Stotsky's up to! I told you long ago that he should be given a lesson he won't forget."

"You won't prove anything with fists," Slava objected, "you'll have to reply to this message from the grave in the next number of *The Fighting Sheet*."

"It's not that he wrote about me," Misha said, "it's the principle of the thing: what is egoism? Yura's trying to confuse the issue. And it's our job to clear it up."

The boys set to work preparing the next number of their newspaper, devoting it to a discussion of the question "What is egoism?"

## Chapter 59

### THE REGIMENTAL GUNSMITH

A few days later Misha, Genka, and Slava were called to the headmaster's room.

A man in a great-coat and army cap was sitting beside Aleksei Ivanovich, reading a newspaper. When the boys came in he turned and looked closely at each of them.

"Sit down, boys," Aleksei Ivanovich said. "Well," he added with a smile, "how do you like Pechorin's reply?"

"But it's all not true," Misha said.

"What isn't true?"

"I don't swot, and anyway, that's not what egoism is."

"What is it, then?"

"Not that."

"Yes, you are right," confirmed Aleksei Ivanovich. "A person is an egoist when he sets his own interests above the interests of society. Naturally, you cannot call a person an egoist for being a good pupil. By being a good pupil he is serving the interests of society. But a slacker is a drag on society. It is he who is the egoist. Is that what you wanted to say?"

"Yes."

"Good." Aleksei Ivanovich fell silent, then asked, "Have you brought the dirk?"

Misha looked indecisively at the man in uniform.

"You may speak about everything in the presence of this comrade," Aleksei Ivanovich added.

The man in uniform carefully studied the scrolls for a long time and when he placed the dirk on the desk, Aleksei Ivanovich said to the boys:

"Well, we are ready to listen to you." He smiled at them.

Misha looked at his friends, coughed and said:

"We have found out that this dirk once belonged to a regimental gunsmith who lived in the reign of Anna Ioannovna, (1730-40.—Tr.) that is in the first half of the eighteenth century."

Aleksei Ivanovich lifted his eyebrows in surprise, and the man in uniform watched Misha attentively.

"Anna Ioannovna?" Aleksei Ivanovich asked.

"Yes, Anna Ioannovna," Misha answered.

"How did you establish that?"

"It was easy." Misha picked up the dirk and pulled the blade out of the sheath. "First of all, the markings. There are three of them: wolf, scorpion, and lily. See them?"

"Yes, yes," Aleksei Ivanovich said. "Go on with your story."

"The wolf," Misha continued, "is the mark of the Solingen smiths in Germany. These blades were called 'wolf cubs'. They were made up to the middle of the sixteenth century."

"That is correct," Aleksei Ivanovich smiled, "there is such a mark for weapons, a very famous mark, I must say."

"Julian del Rei, a Toledo swordsmith," Misha continued more boldly, "engraved his blades with the head of a wolf or a dog."

"He was a baptized Moor," Genka put in.

"He lived at the end of the fifteenth century," Misha went on. "Now the scorpion. This was the mark used by the Milan sword-smiths. Finally, the lily. It was the mark of a Florentine sword-smith."

"Paragini," Genka prompted.

"Yes, Paragini. He, too, lived in the beginning of the sixteenth century. So that is what these markings mean," Misha concluded with a triumphant look at Aleksei Ivanovich and the man in uniform.

"But which of them made this dirk?" Aleksei Ivanovich asked.

"None of them," Misha replied firmly.

"Why do you think so?"

"Because all the books we read said that dirks appeared only at the end of the sixteenth century, while all these markings concern the beginning of the sixteenth century."

Aleksei Ivanovich and the man in uniform exchanged glances and laughed.

"That's logical enough," Aleksei Ivanovich remarked. "In that case what do these markings mean?"

"We don't know," Misha said with a shrug.

"The boys are right," the man in uniform suddenly interrupted, and, taking the blade from Misha, held it to the light. Hardly perceptible wavy drawings in the form of intertwined roses covered the entire length of the blade. "D'you know what this is?" he asked Misha.

"No."

"This is Damascus steel," the man said. "It used to be made only in the East. That means the markings of European swordsmiths have nothing to do with the blade. Obviously the swordsmith who made this dirk wanted to show that his blade was superior to the most famous ones. Possibly that prompted him to make the three markings. Now continue."

Misha hesitated. He was confused because the man in uniform had determined at a single glance what it had taken the boys such a long time to find out.

"Go on, go on!" the man in uniform encouraged him.

"Well," Misha continued, "we decided to find out what dirks were used in Russia. There were three, three types. The first was a naval dirk, but it was four-edged, and this one's three-edged. That didn't suit. The cavalry dirk was 22.75 inches long, and ours is only fourteen inches. Finally, the third type was the dirk made by regimental gunsmiths in the reign of Empress Anna Ioannovna. It was fourteen inches long, the size of our dirk. It had three edges, ours has three edges, too. And other marks also coincide. That's why we settled that our dirk once belonged to a gunsmith who lived in the time of Anna Ioannovna."

Misha finished speaking, stood still for a moment, then sat on the sofa beside Genka and Slava, excitedly waiting for Aleksei Ivanovich and the man in uniform to speak.

"What do you think of this supposition?" Aleksei Ivanovich asked the man in uniform.

"Sensible," the latter replied, "very sensible. All right, we'll try to find the owner."

Aleksei Ivanovich picked up a big square book from his desk. On its thick cover Misha read: *Naval Almanac, 1916*.

"Three officers named Vladimir died when the *Empress Maria* exploded," Aleksei Ivanovich said. "Ivanov—a midshipman, Terentyev—captain of the second rank, Neustroyev—lieutenant. The question is: which of them owned the dirk? Let us see." Aleksei Ivanovich turned over the pages, running his eyes over them. "Ivanov— young and so on and so forth. Neustroyev—a good officer...." Aleksei Ivanovich fell silent, evidently reading to himself, then said slowly: "This is interesting. I want you to listen: 'Tragic death carried away V. V. Terentyev, a prominent engineer of the Russian fleet. His outstanding ability and profound knowledge, acquired under the guidance of the immortal P. N. Podvolotsky, gave him every opportunity of becoming, for the armaments of the navy, what his famous ancestor P. I. Terentyev had been for the armaments of the land forces.'"

"I think you've got it," the man in uniform noted. "Have you a military encyclopaedia, Aleksei Ivanovich?"

"Petrov," Aleksei Ivanovich said, "present my compliments to Sophia Pavlovna and tell her I want volume "F of the military encyclopaedia."

When Genka brought the book, Aleksei Ivanovich turned over the pages and said:

"Here it is. Please listen. Terentyev, Polikarp Ivanovich. 1701-1784. Prominent gunsmith in the reigns of Anna Ioannovna and Elizaveta Petrovna. (1741-61—*Tr.*) Served under Fieldmarshal Minikh. Fought at Ochakov, Stavuchany, and Khotin. Worked out the design for the first diving apparatus. Known as the author of a plan to salvage the frigate *Trapezund*, a scheme considered fantastic at the time.' "

"You see," the man in the uniform said cheerfully to the boys, "your gunsmith has come in handy." Then he added thoughtfully,

"Among other things I've just remembered that there was a Terentyev who also planned the salvage of a ship; not the *Trapezund* but the *Prince*. The *Prince* sank eighty years after the *Trapezund*."

"Here's an interesting coincidence," Aleksei Ivanovich remarked. "The Professor Podvolotsky of the Naval Academy, mentioned in the necrology, is the grandfather of one of our girls."

The boys exchanged glances. Lyolya! Here was something they had never dreamed of!

"Well, boys," the man in uniform said, "you've been putting in some hard work." He rose. "Misha, I'll take the dirk for the time being. Don't worry, I'll let you have it back when we've finished with it. I see you, too, have a secret. Perhaps you'll tell us what it is?"

"We haven't any secrets," Misha replied. "All we want is to find out the secret of the dirk."

"That's right!" The man in uniform put his hand on Misha's shoulder. "I'll help you. I'll tell you everything I find out. And you keep me informed about what you're doing. Only," he laughed, "confine your activities to the library. Keep out of everything. You've done your job. My name's Sviridov. Well, shall we shake on it?" he held out his hand to Misha. It was as big and broad as Polevoy's. And Misha shook it.

## Chapter 60

### A DRAWING LESSON

"That's a new one," Genka stormed as the boys went downstairs. "We got the sheath, did some earnest investigating, wasted hours and hours in the Rumyantsevskaya Library, found out everything, and now, when all that remains is to put our hands on the treasure, he takes away the sheath."

"He did the right thing," Slava said. "We may spoil everything."

"We haven't spoiled anything *so far*," Genka muttered.

"Naturally we mustn't hamper him," Misha agreed, "but why can't we find out about Terentyev? That wouldn't be hampering anyone."

The boys reached the class-room where the drawing lesson had already started. Instead of desks it had stools and easels. The walls were hung with the best drawings done by the school children. Most of them were sketches of decorations for school plays. The shelves under the drawings contained various still life objects: statuettes of Greek gods, animals, papier-mâché fruit. The class on this occasion was making drawings of a classical equestrian statue.

Drawing lessons were always good fun. You could sit how you pleased, move about, and talk. The drawing master, Boris Fyodorovich Romanenko, or Borfyod, as the pupils called him, was a stocky, kindly middle-aged Ukrainian of average height, with a drooping Cossack moustache. He walked between the rows of easels, correcting the work of his pupils.

Misha took a seat beside Lyolya Podvolotskaya.

"I want to ask you something, Lyolya."

"What?" the girl asked, comparing her drawing with the model.

"Tell me, is your grandfather the Admiral Podvolotsky who is a professor at the Naval Academy?"

"Yes. Why?" Lyolya asked, looking up at Misha in surprise.

"Well, you see..." Misha stammered, "one of my distant relatives studied under him at the Academy, then he was listed as missing. What I'd like to find out is whether your grandfather knows anything about his whereabouts."

"But Grandfather died long ago," Lyolya replied.

"Oh, yes," Misha caught himself. "I forgot. But some members of his family are alive?"

"Yes. Grandmother and Aunt Sonya."

"D'you think they knew anything of your grandfather's students?" "I doubt it. I'm sure he lectured without Grandmother's help." "I know that," Misha replied, disappointed. "But it's just possible they knew some of his students." "I hardly think so."

"What's the secret?" Yura Stotsky mocked behind them. Lyolya blushed.

"You see, Yura," she mumbled in confusion, "Misha's asking me about Grandfather."

"I see," Yura smirked, turned sharply on his heel and returned to his easel.

Misha went over to Slava.

"The grandfather's dead, but there's a grandmother and an Aunt Sonya," he whispered. "What if they knew Terentyev?"

"Ask Lyolya. She'll introduce you to her grandmother."

"I've spoken to her about it already," Misha said with a deprecatory gesture. "Just try and have anything to do with girls! Yura Stotsky came up and she blurted out everything."

Misha wanted to tell Genka about this, but saw that he was busy teasing Kit.

"Kit. I say, Kit!"

"What d'you want?"

"What ocean are you from?"

Kit was used to these jokes and kept silent. Then Genka began to shoot

balls of chewed paper through a glass tube. He hit Kit on the is neck and Kit, not realizing what had happened, made as if he were brushing off a fly, to Zina Kruglova's immense amusement. Misha realized that, as monitor, he should stop Genka, but the way Kit was brushing off the non-existent fly was so funny, that Misha too choked with laughter.

Meanwhile Kit continued feeling the back of his neck with one hand and trying futilely to draw a horse with the other.

Boris Fyodorovich stood over him and shook his head reproachfully. Then he went to the blackboard and began to explain about proportion.

"Kitov," Boris Fyodorovich said, drawing a horse with a piece of chalk, "you should take more interest in paintings and develop a taste for art. As far as I can see nothing interests you. Now, tell me the names of the great artists you know."

Kit did not know the names of any artists. He sniffed and looked round-eyed at Boris Fyodorovich.

"Well? You went to the Tretyakov Picture Gallery with us, didn't you? Try to remember the paintings you saw there and the names of the artists. Try, try."

"Repin," Genka murmured behind Kitov.

"Repin," Kitov repeated loudly.

"Correct," Boris Fyodorovich said. "What did Repin paint?"

"Ivan Grozny killing his son," Genka prompted.

"Ivan Grozny killing his son," Kitov repeated sadly.

"Good," Boris Fyodorovich said, dividing the drawing of the horse into squares. "Now tell me the name of another painter."

"Romanenko drew a horse," Genka whispered, suffocating with mirth.

"Romanenko drew a horse," Kitov said, sending the entire class, into a fit of laughter.

"What? What did you say?" Boris Fyodorovich's hand stopped in mid-air.

"He drew a horse," Kitov repeated.

This caused another burst of laughter.

"Who?"

"Well—this—oh, what's his name—Romanenko," Kitov replied.

No one laughed this time. Boris Fyodorovich's face grew livid, and his moustache bristled strangely. Then he threw his chalk on the desk and stamped out of the class.

## Chapter 61

### BORIS FYODOROVICH

"I didn't know his name was Romanenko," Kitov complained. "I thought it was Borfyod."

"You thought," Genka teased him. "I was talking to myself and you go and repeat everything like a parrot. You've got into the habit of depending

on people to prompt you. Now don't you give me away. You've got yourself in the soup, get out of it as best you can."

"You know, Genka," Misha said loudly so that all the class could hear, "that was a mean thing to do."

"What's the matter with you, Misha?" Genka said flushing. "What have I got to do with it?"

But before Misha could reply the door opened and they all rushed to their seats. Aleksei Ivanovich entered. He was tall, thin, and smooth-shaven.

He stopped beside the teacher's desk and looked sternly at the hushed class.

"I do not propose to discuss your shocking behaviour now," Aleksei Ivanovich began slowly, pronouncing every word distinctly. "That is not my purpose; neither do I intend speaking of your treatment of Boris Fyodorovich, who has given so much of his life to you children."

Aleksei Ivanovich paused. The whole class watched him with bated breath.

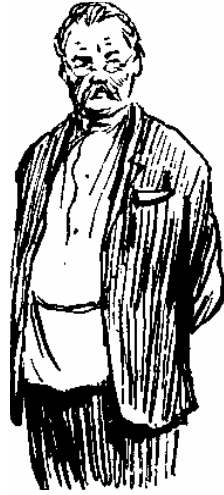
"I wish to speak to you about something quite different," he said impressively. "Something quite different," he repeated. He paused again and looked round the class. "I must admit," he raised his eyebrows, "that I never realized Kitov had a turn for making jokes. I always thought his interests and abilities lay in a somewhat different direction."

There was a slight stir among the pupils. All of them knew to what ability Aleksei Ivanovich was referring and they all cast derisive glances at Kitov.

"It seems," Aleksei Ivanovich continued, "that sitting two years in every class is developing in Kitov a sense of humour, but I must say that this humour is of a very low type. Kitov seems to think it funny to compare a great artist with a modest drawing master, but I do not see anything funny in it. And I shall tell you why.

"As I see it, Kitov thinks Boris Fyodorovich did not become a great artist because he lacked the talent. I can assure you that is not so. Boris Fyodorovich is a very talented person; he graduated from the Academy of Arts and before him lay the broad road to fame, renown, to everything that in Kitov's opinion calls forth respect. But he chose to be a modest drawing teacher, in other words something which in Kitov's opinion is not worthy of respect and can serve as the object of his stupid jokes."

Kitov sat like a statue, his eyes fixed on the desk.



"When he graduated from the Academy," Aleksei Ivanovich went on, "Boris Fyodorovich and certain other comrades who, like him, came from poor families, organized a free art school for the children of workers. They organized not one but several such schools. They looked for gifted children, drew them into the school, and taught them to love art. What made him choose this road? Well, I shall tell you. As a man of the people he had endured great privations in order to gain the right to study and work in art. That is what made him take this road. At that time art was accessible only to the rich, the well-to-do. Boris Fyodorovich's decision was a noble one. He has worked for one purpose all his life. He overcame thousands of obstacles, he knew hunger and cold, he gave up every comfort, and when he finally achieved his goal he rejected all the advantages that it could give him, and all for the sake of another, more difficult but noble task! ... Boris Fyodorovich decided to be a teacher. He decided to devote his entire life to bringing out the young talents of the people, thousands of which perish or are strangled by the whole loathsome system of capitalist society. That is what Boris Fyodorovich gave his life to. You and I understand, of course, that he was mistaken in many things. It was necessary to change the entire system, to create a society that would ensure the development of every man's abilities. That is what the October Revolution did. All the same, in appraising his life, we can say that it has been one of which he can be proud. He can be proud of his life because it has been guided by a pure and lofty purpose."

Steps sounded in the corridor. The door opened and Boris Fyodorovich entered.

"This is why I am telling you all this," Aleksei Ivanovich continued. "To be a great artist, a great scientist, a great writer—all that is very impressive. But the principal work in culture is inconspicuous, routine, and most of it is done by the teacher. He carries culture to the very heart of the people. And if any of you ever become great and famous, remember when you see a modest village schoolmaster, to treat him with respect and never forget that this small unnoticed toiler is training and shaping the best and the most beautiful



of nature's creations—Man."

Aleksei Ivanovich stopped. The class continued to sit in tense silence.

"That is what I wished to talk to you about," Aleksei Ivanovich said. "And now," he turned to Boris Fyodorovich, "please continue the lesson."

He went out of the class-room.

Genka stood up beside his easel and looked at Boris Fyodorovich.

"Why are you standing?" Boris Fyodorovich asked, raising his head.

"Boris Fyodorovich, please forgive me."

"For what?"

"I prompted Kitov. Forgive me, please."

Boris Fyodorovich went up to Genka, put his hand on the boy's shoulder and looked steadily into his eyes.

"All right," Boris Fyodorovich said simply, "get on with your drawing." Then he looked slyly at Kitov and remarked, "I see that even whales take the bait."

He smiled into his moustache and went round the class, looking at the drawings of the classical equestrian statue, pinned to the easels.

## Chapter 62

### GRANDMOTHER PODVOLOTSKAYA AND AUNT SONYA

Lyolya, after all, gave Misha her grandmother's address; and the next evening Misha, Genka, and Slava, on the way to Lyolya's grandmother, took advantage of every icy slide along the pavements.

A tranquil sheet of snow-flakes fell softly in the dim light of the rare street-lamps. Blue stars twinkled in the dark sky. The advertisement on the white-and-blue striped Confectionery Administration Building was studded with electric lamps that blinked over the words: "Your Taste in Confectionery Is Our Guide."

As was usual with him lately, Genka was wearing skates tied to his felt boots with strings and tightened with sticks. His old overcoat was unbuttoned, and the ear-flaps of his peaked cap dangled on his shoulders.

"They couldn't be meaner even if they tried!" Genka was saying angrily. "Before they only used to sprinkle sand on the main streets, and now they're doing it in the side turnings, too. What harm is there in letting a fellow skate? It looks like we'll have to do all our skating at the rink. Pity I haven't got a pair of Norwegian racers. If I had I'd show Yura Stotsky how much of a champion he is."

They approached a small wooden house.

"I don't think it'd be proper for all of us to go in," Misha said. "I'll go alone and you wait for me here."

He felt his way up the dark, creaking stairs by the rickety banisters, reached the second floor, and struck a match.

At the end of the cluttered-up landing he saw a door covered with torn

oilcloth and tape. Misha knocked carefully.

"Kick the door," said a voice in the darkness. It was someone going up the stairs. "The old women there are deaf. Kick."

Misha followed this advice, and soon heard steps and a woman's voice.

"Who is it?"

"I want to see the Podvolotskys!" Misha shouted.

"Who are you?"

"I'm from Lyolya Podvolotskaya."

"Wait, I'll find the key."

The steps faded and five minutes passed before Misha heard them again. A key scraped in the lock for what seemed an eternity, and, finally, the door opened.

Misha almost tripped over some objects as he followed the woman in. He could not see her, only heard her shuffling steps and her murmured: "Careful, don't fall, careful." As though he could see anything in the pitch darkness of the corridor!

The woman opened a door and let Misha into the living-room. A lamp threw a dim light on a small deal table with playing cards on it. Grandmother Podvolotskaya was sitting at the table, and Misha guessed it was Aunt Sonya who was ushering him in.

Misha took stock of his surroundings. Chaotically furnished with cupboards, tables, stools, armchairs, and trunks, the room resembled a furniture shop. In a corner he saw the rounded contours of a baby grand piano. A pipe, suspended to the ceiling with wires, stretched from the iron stove across the entire room. The floor was strewn with potato peelings. In another corner a worn broom lay on top of a pile of rubbish, the accumulation of many days' sweepings. Near the door was a wash-stand and under it a bucket filled to the brim with water.

"Come in, young man," the grandmother said and turned to her cards. "Come in. You'll excuse the disorder—we're rather crowded here." She mused over her cards. "We're saving ourselves from the cold." A pause. She moved the cards. "That's why we've moved into one room: firewood's expensive these days."

"Mother," Aunt Sonya interrupted her as she gripped the handle of a pail with the obvious intention of carrying it out, "you haven't let our visitor sit down and you're already talking about fire-wood."

"Sonya, don't you interfere," the grandmother replied, her eyes on the cards. "Did you put the key back?"

"Yes. Only, for goodness' sake, don't touch it." Aunt Sonya put the pail down on the floor again, apparently weighing over in her mind whether it would hold more water.

"Where did you put it?" "On the cupboard," Aunt Sonya replied irritably and straightened up. "Oh, can't you leave me in peace!"

"I see I can't ask you anything," said the old woman. She shuffled the cards and began laying them out again. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself—in front of a stranger, too." Then the old woman addressed Misha.

"Sit down. Only be careful. A plague on these chairs! The carpenter took

die money but did a poor job. They're all swindlers nowadays. Take last night. A man came here, well-dressed, wanting to buy the dressing-table. I wanted ten millions for it and he offered fifteen roubles. And laughed, mind you. Said millions had been done away with." The old woman moved the cards. " 'What?' I said to him: "Do you know, my dear sir, when millions were introduced I didn't believe it for a year, and sold my things for the stable rouble, and now, well, you'll have to excuse me, if it's millions then millions I'll get'."



"Mother," Aunt Sonya again interrupted her. She was still standing indecisively beside the pail. "Who's interested in your stories? Ask him why he's come."

"Sonya, don't teach me," the old woman replied impatiently. "Are you from the Abrosimovs?" she asked Misha.

"No, I..."

"From the Povzdorovs, then?"

"No, I..."

"From the Zakhlopovs?"

"I'm from your grand-daughter Lyolya. Did you know Vladimir... Vladimir Terentyev?" Misha blurted out in one breath.



## Chapter 63

### LETTERS

"What did you say?" the old woman asked.

Misha repeated his question slowly and distinctly:

"Did you know Vladimir Vladimirovich Terentyev? He was a naval officer and studied at the Academy under your husband, Admiral Podvolotsky."

"Vladimir Vladimirovich Terentyev?" the old woman said thoughtfully. "No, my friend, I never knew him."

"Why, you must remember him, Mother!" Aunt Sonya said. She had taken the pail up once more, but put it down again when she joined the conversation. "You must remember him! Why, he means poor Voldemar, Ksenia's husband."

"Oh!" The old woman clasped her hands, causing the cards to fly off the table. Misha quickly bent down to pick them up. "Oh, Voldemar! Goodness! Ksenia!" She raised her eyes to the ceiling, saying in a sing-song voice: "Voldemar! Ksenia! Goodness, what a tragedy! Poor Voldemar." She turned to Misha. "Yes, but he was killed."

"I know," Misha said. "But I want to know about his family."

"Yes, I knew Voldemar," the old woman sighed. "And his wife, Ksenia Sigizmundovna. Only that was a long time ago."

"Excuse me," Misha rose, "what did you say his wife's first name and patronymic was?"

"Ksenia Sigizmundovna."

"Sigizmundovna?"

"Yes, Ksenia Sigizmundovna. She was a beautiful woman," the grandmother chattered, "as beautiful as a picture."

"Did you by any chance know her brother?" Misha asked carefully.

"Certainly," the old woman said sadly, "Valeri Nikitsky! He was a brilliant officer. And handsome. He, too, was killed in the war." She sighed. "I knew them all, but it was so long ago. "Voldemar's mother, Terentyeva—

oh, yes—Maria Gavrilovna—to tell you the truth I never liked her. An unpleasant woman, *a* commoner. But then," she compressed her lips with dignity, "I don't know your views. Commoners are in fashion these days."

"You don't happen to know where they are now?" Misha asked.

"I don't, my friend, I don't," the old woman shook her head. "What I don't know, I don't know. Their whole family was strange, mysterious. They always talked of secrets, legends, awful things...."

"Could you possibly have their former address?"

"I couldn't tell you that either. They lived in Petersburg, but I've forgotten the address."

"I think we can find the address," Aunt Sonya suddenly remarked.

She was- standing near the door with the pail in her hand. Misha turned to her.

"His letters to father have the address on them," Aunt Sonya continued. "But it's simply impossible to find anything in this chaos!"

"Won't you please find it," Misha said, turning a pleading look from the grandmother to Aunt Sonya and then back to the grandmother, "please, it's very important. One of my relatives is missing." He sprang up from his chair. "I'll help you, don't trouble yourself, just tell me what to do. Please!"

"Find it for him, Sonya, find it," the old woman said benevolently and again turned her attention to the cards.

Aunt Sonya wavered, but the chance to postpone taking the slop-pail outside was apparently overwhelming. She put the pail back in the puddle and showed Misha what to do.

He moved a cupboard and a chest of drawers, climbed on the piano, pulled out a box, and after that a basket. It was heavy work, but Misha managed it.

Aunt Sonya bent over the basket and took from it a big paper package on which was written in faded letters: "From V. V. Terentyev."

"Thank you very much," Misha said gratefully, returning the basket to its place and putting on his cap, "thank you very much!"

"You're welcome, young man, you're welcome," the grandmother said without looking up from her cards. "Come to see us any time you wish. Good-bye."

Stuffing the packet of letters into his pocket, Misha ran to his friends, waiting for him in the street, and they quickly went home.



Part VI

THE COTTAGE IN PUSHKINO

Chapter 64

SLAVA



The letters were all in similar envelopes. The address on them was written in a neat hand: His Excellency Pyotr Nikolayevich Podvolotsky. Residence. Ruzheiny Lane, Moscow. From V. V. Terentyev, S. S. Vasilyeva Residence, Moika, St. Petersburg.

The contents were also very similar. Saint's day congratulations, New Year and Christmas greetings. Only one postcard, dated December 12, 1915, was somewhat lengthier:

"Dear Pyotr Nikolayevich," Terentyev had written, "I am writing from the railway station. The train is due to leave in thirty minutes and I regret this prevents me from having the honour of personally paying you my respects. I was held up in Pushkino and I must be with my unit not later than the 15th. Whatever happens to me I remain,

"Sincerely yours,

"F.  
Terentyev"

"We must go to Petersburg," Genka decided.

"The postcard also mentions Pushkino," Misha noted.

"Why rack our brains when we have the exact address," Genka objected.

"We must go."

"These letters are eight years old," Slava said. "Perhaps the Terentyevs

aren't living there any longer."

"We'll ask the address bureau first," Misha said, settling the matter.

The boys composed a letter, put it in an envelope, but found they had no stamps. This circumstance made them postpone posting the letter till the following day.

They were sitting in Slava's flat. Alia Sergeyevna was at the theatre, as usual, and Konstantin Alekseyevich hadn't returned from the factory.

"Mm," Genka said dreamily, looking at the green envelope on the table, "mm—we're on the last lap. The treasure is sure to be ours now."

"You still dreaming of treasure!" Slava laughed.



"Why not?" Genka said with a stubborn shake of his head. "I've found out everything. In the old days everyone was afraid of Biron ([A court favourite and tyrant in the reign of Anna Ioannovna.—Ed](#)) and hid their treasures from him. That I know for sure!"

"What else did you find out?" Misha asked, teasing him.

"And I found out," Genka continued imperturbably, "that the finder of treasure gets a quarter of the stuff. That means we must collect our share right away, or we'll be put off for a whole year," he added in a business-like manner. '

His friends laughed.

"Naturally, I don't believe in treasures," Slava said, "but let's assume that we're actually on the track of treasure. We'll get a certain share if we find it. What'll we do with it?"

"What?" Genka exclaimed. "I've decided that ages ago. We'll donate it to an orphans' home. So that an entire orphans' home will be built with the money. And then the newspapers will write about us."

"Why the newspapers," Misha offered. "Right over the door: *The Gennady Petrov Orphanage.*"

"If we really find treasure," Slava said thoughtfully, "I'll give it to build a sanatorium for children. A big beautiful sanatorium somewhere on the shores of the Black Sea."

"No, thank you," Genka shook his head, "you can do what you want with your share, but I'll dispose of my share as I see fit. Resorts, sanatoria! That's



for sissies! But seriously, we should use this money to build a big stadium right in the centre of Moscow, with a skating rink, a football field, tennis courts.... There. And make it free for children."

"Have you distributed it all? Sure you haven't forgotten anything?" Misha asked derisively.

"You see, Misha," Slava said with a smile, "none of this is serious. But just suppose we do find treasure, what would you use it for?"

"I don't know," Misha replied, "I hadn't thought of it. But I don't believe there is any treasure."

"But I do," Genka said. "And let me tell you we're going to build that stadium. As for resorts and sanatoria... that's all Slava's fantasy. You'll probably think of building some music school, too."

"What's wrong with that?" Slava said, touched to the quick. "D'you think stadiums are needed more than music schools?"

"What a comparison! Music schools! Why, you poor. . ." Then suddenly Genka said earnestly, "You know, Slava, you should give your future serious thought."

"What d'you mean?"

"Just this. If you want to be accepted in the Komsomol, you've got to think of your future seriously."

"Why?"

"As if you don't know. You're thinking of becoming a musician, aren't you?"

"Suppose I am. What of it?"

"Don't you see? You were at the meeting and you heard of the tasks the Komsomol has been set. What did Nikolai say? He said that the Komsomol's task is to build communism. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, but what has music got to do with it?"

"You *are* stupid! Everyone's going to build and you're going to push ivories. That won't do."

"I can just see *you* building! A fine builder you'll make!" Slava said in an offended tone.

"Of course," Genka said merrily, "of course. I'll go to a factory school after I finish grammar school. I'll be a metal-worker; a real worker. They'll take me into the Komsomol without probation. We've decided that long ago with Misha. Isn't that right, Misha?"

Misha hesitated.

At the last Young Pioneer meeting Nikolai had read them Lenin's speech at the Third Komsomol Congress in 1920. One place in that speech had struck Misha:

"But the generation which is now fifteen years old will see the communist society, and will itself build this society. And it must know that the whole purpose of its life is to build this society."

Misha had pondered over these words a long time. They directly concerned him, Genka, and Slava. The aim of all their lives was to build communism. Polevoy had told him the same thing when he said:

"If you'll live for the people you'll sail on a big ship."

To live for the people and not for oneself was precisely what building communism meant. And what about Slava? Was he going to write music for himself? Weren't songs needed by the people? What about the *Internationale*? Misha looked at Slava.

"Don't worry, Slava," he said, "I think they'll take you in the Komsomol."

## Chapter 65

### KONSTANTIN ALEKSEYEVICH

The hall door squeaked. The boys heard someone in the corridor begin taking off his coat and overshoes, and blowing his nose. Slava listened.

"That's Father."

Konstantin Alekseyevich came into the room, still blowing his nose into a big handkerchief. Always ruddy, his cheeks were now crimson from the frost. And there was the usual kind smile in his small eyes.

"Oho, the Young Pioneers!" he greeted the boys. "Hello!" He shook hands with them, and when Slava's turn came he said, "We haven't seen each other to-day, you know."

Dasha, the maid, followed Konstantin Alekseyevich into the room and busied herself laying the table.

Konstantin Alekseyevich washed his hands, dried them on a towel which he threw over the back of a chair, and sat down. Slava took the towel to the bedroom and returned to the dining-room.

"Well, my Young Pioneers, what were you talking about?" Konstantin Alekseyevich noticed the envelope, took it and read the address. 'Address Bureau, Petrograd.' Who are you looking for?"

"Oh, someone," Slava said, taking the envelope from his father and hiding it in his pocket.

"I see, a secret!" Konstantin Alekseyevich laughed, breaking off a piece of bread and putting it into his mouth. "Well, what were you talking about?"

"We were talking about different professions, Father. Who'll be what," Slava replied.

"Hm! Well, who's going to be what?"

"We were just... sort of indefinite... just talking about it."

"All the same," Konstantin Alekseyevich peppered his soup and tasted it. "All the same what did you decide?"

"I'm going to be a musician—and they," Slava pointed to his friends, "let them tell you themselves. Genka says a musician can't be a Komsomol member."

"I didn't say that," Genka protested.

"You certainly did. Misha heard you."

"Then you didn't understand what I meant." Genka looked at Konstantin Alekseyevich. "What I meant was that in addition to being a musician you've got to have another profession so as to be useful." Genka was aware that this

was a sore point between Konstantin Alekseyevich and Slava.

"Good lad, Genka," Konstantin Alekseyevich applauded, "good lad! That's exactly what we often talk about with Slava. You must have a profession. In life you have to stand firmly on your feet. In your spare time you can be a canary if you want to."

"Just the same I'm going to be a musician," Slava said.

"Please yourself, who's stopping you! Borodin, too, was a great composer, but he was a chemist, you know. How do you like that? A chemist."

"That's a matter of personal taste, Father."

"Certainly." Konstantin Alekseyevich moved his plate away and wiped his lips with a napkin. "You don't have to be a chemist. You can choose another profession, something solid."

"Isn't music, the theatre, painting, art in general, isn't that a profession?" Slava argued.

"Yes, it's a profession, only—it's up in the air," Konstantin Alekseyevich twisted his fingers in the air.

"Why d'you think it's up in the air?" Slava persisted. "Many men of art made Russia famous. Composers Chaikovsky and Glinka, the artist Repin, the author Tolstoy."

"Well, my friend," Konstantin Alekseyevich drawled, "you're talking of giants. Not everyone has the gift." He fell silent, looked at Misha and smiled: "And what about you, Misha? What have you to say to all this?"

"I agree with Slava," Misha said. "If he wants to be a musician, he ought to study and be one. You say he must learn a profession, to be something else besides. If he does that, he'll have to go to an institute, say, to be an engineer; but his heart won't be in the thing and he'll throw it up to be a musician as soon as he graduates. That would be wasting his time and the government's money. What's more, he'd be filling a place another fellow would gladly take. Our country hasn't many institutes as yet to let people go around taking up one profession and then dropping it for another."

"M-yes—" Konstantin Alekseyevich crumbled a piece of bread thoughtfully, "yes—I see I can't agree with you. I'm of the old school, you know."

He rose and began pacing the room.

"This is the way I see it," he continued. "When I was young I, too, acted in amateur plays and very nearly became an actor. My wife's an actress. I understand, youth is always impetuous." He sighed noisily. "But this is a different matter."

He walked silently across the room, pushed a chair closer to the table, smoothed the table-cloth, then walked up and down again.

"I, too, was fourteen once," he went on. "I lived in a boy's world, had my hobbies, friends, relatives, books, dreams, while life went on around me. Life was a dense forest," he stressed, raising his finger, "it was interesting and at the same time frightening: you'd wonder how it'd be when you were all alone. Quite alone without relatives, comrades, or home! And my mother, I remember, was always sorry for me. She always worried about the time when I'd be alone, how I'd make my way. Make my way! What strong

words, too!" He cut the air with his powerful fist. "Make my way!!! I had to fight!!!... And he," Konstantin Alekseyevich pointed to Misha, "he's already counting the government's money. Why, says he, should the government waste its money.... When I was young I used to think: 'Oho, that's a good job, with a good income, how can I get hold of it.' And now, here's Misha saying: 'Slava, don't waste a place in the institute, *someone else* can study in your place....' Someone else. And who's this someone else? Ivanov? Petrov? Sidorov? Who's he? His relative? His friend? Nothing of the kind! He's never seen him, doesn't know and doesn't need to know him.... It's important to him that the government should get another engineer. That's what he cares about."

"You think that's wrong?" Slava smiled.

"I'm not saying it's wrong," Konstantin Alekseyevich said, still pacing the room. Then he stopped in front of Genka. "See, Genka, they've defeated us. Eh?"

"Why 'us'?" Genka objected. "You, not 'us'."

"How's that?" Konstantin Alekseyevich asked, truly astonished. "Only a minute ago you were supporting my point of view, I think?"

"Oh," Genka drawled, "that was ages ago!" and moved to another part of the room.

"I beg your pardon," Konstantin Alekseyevich said with a helpless gesture, "my only ally has gone over to the enemy. Well, and what are you going to be?"

"I'm going to serve in the navy," Genka announced.

"He keeps changing his mind every minute," Slava laughed. "Just half an hour ago he said he was going to a factory school and now he wants to be a sailor."

"First to the factory school and then to the navy," Genka said coolly.

"Well, well. What about you, Misha?"

"I don't know. I haven't decided yet."

"He also wants to go to a factory school," Genka shouted, "I know, and after that he wants to go to the Communist University."

"Shut up, Genka!" Misha stopped him.

"Yes," Konstantin Alekseyevich said, shaking his head, "you're aiming high. But I thought you intended finishing secondary school, Misha."

"I don't know," Misha replied unwillingly, "it's difficult for Mother."

"They won't let him leave school!" Slava interrupted. "He's at the top of the class."

"I can study in the evenings," Misha said. "Many Komsomol members work in the day-time and study in the evenings. We'll see how it works out."

He looked at the clock. His glance caught the minute hand as it jerked and stopped at the figure 9. Quarter to twelve. The boys got ready to go home.

"Well, well," said Konstantin Alekseyevich, beaming at them in approval as he shook hands with them. "A little argument isn't going to spoil our friendship, I hope. You know I wish you real success in everything you do."

## Chapter 66

### CORRESPONDENCE

A week later the boys had a reply from the address bureau.

"In reply to your request," it said, "we are informing you that inquiries must be accompanied by the year and place of birth of the party concerned."

"Try and find out where and when this Maria Gavrilovna was born," Genka said. "We'll have to go to Petrograd."

"There'll be time enough for that," Misha replied. "As for this reply, it's a piece of sheer red tape. We'll write to the secretary of the Komsomol cell there."

The friends composed the following letter:

To the Secretary Komsomol Cell, Address Bureau, Petrograd.  
Dear Comrade Secretary,

Excuse us for troubling you, but the matter is very important. Before the war, in 1914, Vladimir Vladimirovich Terentyev lived in Petrograd with his wife Ksenia Sigizmundovna and his mother Maria Gavrilovna, at the S. S. Vasilyeva Residence, Moika Street. Would you please tell us if they are still living there. Not all of them, of course, because Vladimir Vladimirovich was blown up on a battleship; but his mother and wife are probably alive. We have already sent an inquiry, but your people want us to give them the year and place of birth of the Terentyevs, which is sheer red tape. As the secretary of the Komsomol cell you ought to give serious attention to this red tape and burn it out with red-hot irons.

With Young Pioneer greetings,

*Polyakov, Petrov, Eldarov.*

They posted the letter and waited.

Half the school year had almost come to an end.

The boys were well up in all their subjects; only Genka lagged behind in German.

"I don't see why they're filling us up with this *deutsche Sprache*."

"What do you mean... why?" Misha replied. "What if we go to Germany?"

"How'll we go there?"

"Very simply: we'll just up and go."

The boys studied specially hard during these days, and there was plenty to do in the Young Pioneer Detachment as well. That left them with hardly any free evenings. There was the work for the children's home that the detachment had taken under its wing, there were the classes in the workshops at the House of Young Pioneers, there were meetings of their Young Pioneer group, meetings of the school committee. Then by this time the boys never missed open Komsomol meetings, and there were the evenings they spent at the hobbies circle. Every Sunday morning there was

the Young Pioneer detachment meeting, and Misha's group had to keep up their correspondence with the Young Pioneers of the Orekhovo-Zuyevo district and with sailors in the Red Navy.

And there was the skating rink at least two or three times a week.

The friends would arrive at the skating rink in the evening, hurriedly change on the crowded benches, tie on their skates, and take their belongings to the cloak-room. The skates would ring hollowly on the wooden floor of the cloak-room, which would fill with clouds of white frosty air streaming in from the skating rink through the constantly opening door.

Adult skaters changed in a separate room. They emerged from it in black close-fitting skating suits and caps. The boys would whisper admiringly: "Melnikov... Ippolitov... Kushin..." (Skating champions—Tr.)

Pools of light from the arc-lamps illumined the snowy strips on the ice. The skaters circled round and round and their aimless skating made them appear grotesque. Although they moved in a mass, they either held themselves aloof or skated in pairs, overtaking each other. The beginners skated gingerly, lifting their legs high in the air, pushing off clumsily, and going forward awkwardly under their own momentum.

All the boys had beginner's skates except Yura Stotsky. He had Norwegian racers.

Dressed in a black knitted suit he skated only on the racing track, his body bent well forward and his hands behind his back. Every line of his face and body expressed whole-hearted contempt for all the other boys.

Misha and Slava paid no attention to him, but Genka could not tolerate Yura's superior attitude, and one day turned into the track and tried to race him.

Genka was a very good skater, the best in the school, but his skates were no match for Yura's. He disgraced himself by falling a whole half-circle behind Yura.

After this "race" all Genka's friends began to tease him and ask when he intended competing with Yura Stotsky again. They suggested cutting off the rounded ends of his skates and sharpening the blades with a file. At the skating rink he always had a troop of boys in tow, egging him on.

"Hey, felt boots, how about a new record!"

Yura Stotsky basked in triumph.

Genka, dispirited, stopped going to the rink and no longer skated in the streets. He went about very gloomy, but one day he surprised his friends by inviting them to his birthday party the following Saturday.

"Is it going to be a Dutch treat?"

"The treat's on me, but you'll bring the presents."

"All right. We'll come and see what your hospitality's like."

## **Chapter 67**

### **GENKA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY**

On Saturday evening the boys went to Genka's and their eyes popped with amazement at the sight of the festively laden table. At one end of it stood a steaming samovar, with a coloured tea-pot on top. In the middle of the table were plates filled with food: slices of pork, curd dumplings in cream, pies, and sweets. The table was laid for six. Aunt Agrippina was fussing round the table.

"What a spread!" Misha drawled. "Good for you, Genka!"

"Nothing special," said Genka carelessly. "Won't you sit down?" He made a theatrical gesture, inviting them to the table.

"Why are you inviting them to the table so soon," said Aunt Agrippina. "Aren't you going to wait for the others?"

"Who?" the boys asked in one voice.

Genka flushed.

"Mikhail Korovin, and no one else. Honest, no one else is coming."

"And who's this for?" Misha pointed to the sixth plate.

"That? Oh, that. That's just in case. You never know... someone might drop in."

"Where'd you get the money for all this?" Misha asked.

Genka smiled.

"That's my secret." He turned to Aunt Agrippina but not in time to stop her.

"His father sent it," she said, giving him away. "I told him: Gennady, there's enough food here to last us a month, but he wouldn't listen. Put it all on the table, he says, and be done with it. Just like his father!" she added; but though she said it reproachfully there was a note of admiration in her voice.

"He even sent some sweets," Misha remarked.

"No," interjected Aunt Agrippina. "Genka bought those himself. He sold his skates."

"Auntie," Genka cried, "didn't I ask you not to say anything?" "I don't see why I shouldn't say it," said Aunt Agrippina, waving Genka aside. "It's better that way. Less wear and tear on your felt boots."



"If I had known you'd sold your skates for this," Misha said, "I wouldn't have come."

"I'll manage without skates," Genka said shaking his head. "The ones I had were rotten anyway! I'll buy Norwegian racers when I start working. You sold your stamp collection, didn't you? Why?"

"I had to," Misha replied evasively.

"I know," Genka said, "you're saving for a leather jacket. You want to look like a real Komsomol member."

"Maybe," Misha parried. "Slava sold his chessmen."

"You didn't, did you?" Genka said in surprise. "Not the ivory ones? Whatever for?"

"I had to," Slava said, also evasively. The bell rang three times.

"More guests!" Aunt Agrippina announced and went to open the door.

Mikhail Korovin walked in dressed in the school uniform and cap of the labour colony. (These colonies were first organized in Poltava by A. Makarenko, the remarkable Soviet pedagogue, with permission from the Public Education Department. Later Makarenko described them in his books *The Road to Life* and *Learning to Live—Ed.*) He shook hands with the boys, took off his coat, pulled out a packet of cigarettes, chose one and lit it.

"How are things?" Misha asked.

"Oh, all right. I passed the fourth-category examinations yesterday."

"What will your wages be now?"

"About ninety roubles," Korovin replied nonchalantly, pulling out of his pocket a watch the size of an alarm clock. He pressed it to his ear and said, "Can't find time to take it to the watchmaker's. Have to get it cleaned."

"Let's see!" Genka took the watch and put it to his ear. "Runs smoothly enough."

"Yes, it does," Korovin said, "fifteen jewels." He put the watch away in his jacket pocket and added: "They've organized a Komsomol cell at our place. I've already sent in an application."

Ninety roubles a month and a watch the boys could just about tolerate. But the last piece of news was too much for them. They were still Young



Pioneers, were only dreaming of the day when they would join the Komsomol and here was Korovin, already handing in an application.

"We shall join the Komsomol, too," Misha announced, "straight from the detachment." He gave Genka and Slava a sidelong glance.

They maintained an important silence as though Misha had told the truth.

"Guess who's been sent to our school?" Korovin asked.

"Who?"

"Borka the Skinflint."

"Is that a fact?"

"Uh-huh. His father almost killed him because of the sheath. He ran away and now he's with us." "Well, how is he?"

"All right. Reforming."

The bell rang again. Aunt Agrippina went to open the door. Genka stood in the middle of the room, embarrassed and silent. The door opened and Zina Kruglova entered.... So that was it! Misha and Slava exchanged meaning looks. Genka did not move from the spot, but held out his hand and mumbled:

"Won't you sit down?"

Zina giggled and everybody laughed. That brought Genka to his senses. He assumed the theatrical pose and announced:

"Dear guests, thanks for your congratulations, and now I'll accept your presents! Please don't push. Keep your places in the queue!" Zina laughed till she was out of breath. She was so full of fun! Her present was a clown whose shock of hair made him look very much like Genka.

"Wonderful!" Genka said. "Girls always do the proper thing. I wonder what the boys are going to gladden my eyes with?"

"Oh, yes," Misha suddenly recollected, "I'd almost forgotten."

He opened his schoolbag and took out a packet. His face was so serious as he opened it that everyone fell silent and watched the movement of his hands. Misha opened the packet slowly as though the silent anticipation of his friends had not communicated itself to him.

When only the last wrapping remained and the outlines of some long object could be made out clearly, Misha stopped and looked around. Genka bent forward impatiently. Misha unfolded the last wrapping and the steel blade of one skate flashed in his hands.... A Norwegian racer!

Genka carefully took the skate. First he looked at it without saying anything, then began feeling it, ran his fingernail along the blade, put it to his ear, snapped his fingers and finally said:

"Oh, this is great! Where's the other?"

Misha threw out his hands.

"That's all there is—I couldn't get the second one."

Genka pulled a long face.

"Never mind," Misha sighed, "you'll manage on one for the time being."

Genka wore such a sorry expression that even Zina did not laugh, although it was funny to think of Genka at the skating rink on one racer.

Genka put his present on a stool, and sighed heavily.

"Well, won't you please sit down," he said sadly.

"Wait a minute," Slava stopped him, "I've got a present for you, too." He put his hand into his briefcase, rummaged a long time and there was the second skate.

"Fooled again!" Genka whooped. Then he stopped, and looked closely at his friends.

"That means," he said slowly, "the stamp collection, the chessmen, the leather jacket...."

"That's enough," Misha interrupted him, "let's forget it."

## Chapter 68

### PUSHKINO

The reply from Petrograd finally came.

"Hello, boys!

"Your letter reached me. We have many Terentyevs, but not the ones you want. Vasilyeva, the former landlady, whom I went to see personally, said that Terentyev and his wife lived in her house before the war and that the mother lived somewhere near Moscow. That is all I could learn. About the red tape you mentioned, I would advise you to go easy. Petrograd has thousands of Terentyevs and it is impossible to give their addresses without precise information. With Komsomol greetings,

*"Kupriyanov."*

"There," Misha said, "learn how to make use of the achievements of science and technique."

"Where does technique come into it?" Genka asked.

"Don't you see? Isn't the postal service a kind of technique? That's the way sensible people go about things, while thoughtless people fly all over the place."

"That answer about red tape let you down, didn't it?" Genka said caustically.

"It did not," Misha answered, "but that's not the point. We'll go to Pushkino on Sunday and take along our skis."

"Why skis?" Slava asked, surprised.

"As a blind."

The following Sunday the boys got off the train at Pushkino station. Each was carrying a pair of skis and sticks.

Along the high wooden platform of the rickety railway station stood numerous kiosks piled high with snow. Beyond them, stretching in different directions lay several streets lined with dark fencing that enclosed each

square plot of land round the wooden country cottages with their glass green-houses. A little path, trampled hard by footsteps in the deep snow, led up to each cottage. The only sign of life in the seemingly deserted neighbourhood was the curling blue smoke rising from the chimneys.

"Slava, you come with me. We'll do one side of the street, and you, Genka, do the other," Misha said. "The main thing is to look at every name-plate."

"That'll take us a whole year," Slava remarked. "We'd do better to ask at the local Soviet."

"That won't do," Misha objected. "This is a small neighbourhood and it'll make people suspicious."

"Who've we got to be afraid of?" Genka argued. "The old woman'll be happy when we find the treasure."

"You've never seen her and you're already arguing," Misha said. "Come on."

They searched all day but did not find the cottage Terentyeva lived in.

"We shan't get anywhere like this," Slava sighed when the boys returned to the station, "half the houses have no name-plate. We'll have to ask at the local Soviet."

"But I've already told you we can't do that," Misha said, getting angry. "Have you forgotten what Sviridov said? This is a very delicate matter. We'll come back next Sunday and continue the search."

The boys took off their skis. When they reached the ticket window, someone called out to them.

"Hello, boys!"

They turned round and saw Elena and Igor.

Elena was smiling in a friendly way. Her flaxen locks escaped from her little fur cap and fell on the collar of her coat. Igor, as usual, looked serious.

"Haven't seen you for ages," he said gruffly as he shook hands with them.

"Been out skiing?" Elena asked. "Why didn't you come to see us?" "We didn't know you lived here," Misha replied.

"Yes, we live here. We have a cottage in the neighbourhood. Won't you come?"

"It's late," Misha said, "we'll come next Sunday."

"We'll be here, never fear," Genka added mysteriously. "We have business here."

"What business?" Elena asked.

"Oh, nothing much," Misha said with a fierce look at Genka.

"Do tell me," Elena insisted.

"I'm looking for my aunt," Genka announced suddenly.

This surprised Elena.

"Isn't your aunt living in Moscow?"

"Yes, but this is a different one. Can't I have two aunts?"

"And you didn't find her?"

"No, we lost the address."

"What's her name?"

The boys did not answer.

"What's her name? Have you lost that, too?"  
"Her name's Terentyeva, and she's called Maria Gavrilovna!" Misha said unexpectedly. "Do you know her?"  
"Terentyeva, Maria Gavrilovna? I know her. She's our neighbour. Come on, we'll show you."

## Chapter 69

### NIKITSKY

"Remember," Misha said on the way, "you mustn't tell Genka's aunt that he's looking for her."

"Why not?"

"That's a long story. She thinks Genka's dead and she has to be prepared. If we drop on her out of the blue she may have a stroke and die of happiness. She's an ailing woman, and... well, you know what a 'nephew' she's got!"

"We hardly know her," Elena replied. "She doesn't see anybody."

"On the whole," Misha continued, "don't mention this to anyone. And don't tell your father."

"Father's dead," Elena said.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know." After a moment's silence he asked,

"How are you getting along now?"

"We live by ourselves. Igor and I work at the circus."

They approached Elena's home.

"This is where she lives," Elena pointed to a neighbouring cottage.

Behind the tall fence they saw only the roof, with a porous crust of snow along its edges.

"What's this street called?" Misha asked.

"Yamskaya Sloboda," Igor said. "Our number's eighteen, and Terentyeva's twenty."

"Is that how well you looked?" Misha rebuked Genka.

"I can't understand how I missed it," Genka mumbled, averting his eyes.

"This side hasn't even a ski trail," Slava noted.

"That can't be," Genka muttered, looking at the path. "What's happened to it? It's got rubbed out! That's all. Look how much traffic there's been!" He pointed to the deserted street.

"Come in for a moment," coaxed Elena. "True, we haven't been home for three days, but we'll get the stove going in a jiffy and it'll soon warm up."

The cottage was small and quiet. The windows were heavily frosted over. The wall clock ticked rhythmically. The floor-boards creaked slightly as the friends entered the house. Brightly coloured rugs lay on the well-scrubbed floor, and a big paraffin lamp hung over the table that was covered with a flowered oilcloth. On the wall were large framed portraits of a man and woman. The man had a thick moustache, and his hair was neatly parted. His smooth-shaven chin rested on the bent corners of his stiffly starched collar.

"Just like Grandfather's portrait in Revsk," Misha thought.

Elena changed into an old coat, put on felt boots, and tied a kerchief round her head. This made her look like a village girl with her laughing blue eyes and straight little nose.

"Let's fetch the fire-wood," she called to Igor.

"We'll bring it," the boys shouted. "Show us where it is."

They trooped into the back-yard. Elena opened the shed and Misha and Genka began chopping the wood. Slava and Igor carried it into the house, and while the boys were busy Elena went for water, rattling the pails as she went.

Genka worked with a will.

"We'll chop up the lot," he muttered, swinging the axe. "Why bother each time you want wood."

But one of the logs did not yield to his efforts.

"Chuck it out and take another," Misha advised.

"No." Genka was red in the face and his peaked cap had slipped to the back of his head. "This log's stubborn, but so am I."

Soon both stoves in the house were crackling with a bright flame. The youngsters sat round the stove in the little kitchen; Elena and Slava on chairs and the others on the floor.

"This is how we live," Elena sighed, taking up her knitting. "We only come here on our day off, when we're not performing."

"We must move to Moscow," Igor said gruffly.

"I shall be sorry to leave," Elena objected, "Mother and Father lived here."



The flames roared up the pipe and bright flares flickered on the floor.

"We'll be here all the week," Elena said. "It would be fun if you'd come down for a visit."

"I don't know if we can manage it," Misha replied. "We'll be very busy this week. To-morrow there's a meeting to decide whether to recommend us for the Komsomol. If they decide to recommend us, then we'll have to go to the cell bureau, then to the Komsomol cell Committee, and then to the district committee of the Komsomol."

"You're going to be Komsomol members already?" Elena asked in surprise.

"Yes." Misha was silent for a moment, then asked, "Tell me, have you got an attic?"

"Yes."

"Can you see the Terentyev garden from it?"

"Yes. But why do you ask?"

"I'd like to take a look."

"Come on, I'll show you."

Misha and Elena went out into the cold corridor and climbed the steep staircase to the attic.

"Give me your hand," Elena offered, "you might stumble." They went across to the window.

The whole neighbourhood lay before them, its streets dividing it into squares. Beyond it were the woods, severed by the railway line.

Houses, sheds, and fences threw long shadows on the snow. It was almost as light as day.

Elena stood beside Misha. The moonlight made her face look quite transparent, only her thin eyebrows and curled lashes stood out black against it. She held Misha by the hand and both were silent....

Misha looked into the Terentyeva's back-yard. It was large and deserted. There were some logs and wooden buildings near the fence.

Somewhere an engine whistled and suddenly broke off again.

Misha was still watching the back-yard when the door of the cottage suddenly opened. A tall man emerged with a short fur jacket thrown over his shoulders. He stood with his back to Misha smoking. Then he threw the stub on the snow and turned slowly. Misha squeezed Elena's hand with all his strength.

The man was Nikitsky.



## Chapter 70

### ABOUT FATHER

The friends returned to Moscow late that night, and when Misha reached home it was already midnight.

Mother was sitting at the table reading a book. When Misha entered she turned and shook her head in silent reproach.

"You see, Mother," Misha said quickly, "we met some friends in Pushkino and that's why I'm so late. We had supper there, so don't worry." He looked over her shoulder. "What are you reading? Oh, *Anna Karenina*."

His mother felt the note of indifference in his voice.

"You don't like it?" she asked.

"Not specially. I prefer *War and Peace*." Misha sat on the bed and began undressing.

"Why?"

"Why?" Misha thought for a moment, then said, "In *War and Peace* all the heroes are serious: Bolkonsky, Bezukhov, Rostov.... But here you can't understand what they are. That Stiva's an idler. A man of forty and acting the baby all the time!"

"Not all the heroes are so carefree," Mother objected. "Take Levin, for example."

"Yes, Levin, of course, is a little more serious. But then he's not interested in anything except his farm."

"You must understand," Mother said, slowly choosing her words, "that these people were typical of their time, of their society...."

"I understand all that." Misha was already under the blanket and his arms were folded under his head. "That was high society. *War and Peace*, too, shows us this high society. But look at the difference. There the people have aims and aspirations, they recognize their duty to society, but in your book you can't understand what they live for. Vronsky and Stiva, for instance. Tell me: a person must have some aim in life, mustn't he?"

"Naturally," Mother said, "but I think every hero and heroine in *Anna Karenina* has an aim. True, their aims are personal: for example, personal happiness, life with the person one loves. Little aims, but they're aims all the same."

Misha raised himself on his elbow.

"D'you call that an aim, Mother? If we reason that way then every person has an aim. Then a drunkard also has an aim: to get drunk every day. And the bourgeois aims at making a fortune. But that's not the sort of aim I mean."

"What sort of aim do you mean, then?"

"Well, how can I put it. One's aim ought to be lofty, you understand? Noble."

"But you haven't told me yet what you mean."

"Well, for example, I spoke with Slava's father the other day. He told me himself. In the old days he worked only for money. He went where they'd pay him most. That meant he hadn't a lofty aim. And if he's working all day now and wants to restore the factory so that our country will have lots of goods, that means he has a noble aim. Perhaps my example isn't a very good

one, but that's how I understand it."

"How can he be blamed? You know very well that he couldn't have set himself that aim before. He worked for a capitalist and of course he wasn't interested in anything except his salary."

"Well, he shouldn't have done," Misha replied decisively. "Father didn't work for capitalists."

"That isn't quite true," Mother shook her head. "Father, too, had to work for capitalists."

"But that's altogether different. He worked to earn a living. But that was not the main thing in his life. He was a revolutionary. And he gave his life for the Revolution. That means he had the most lofty, most noble aim."

They were silent.

"You know, Mother," Misha said, "I can picture Father quite well. It seems to me he was never afraid of anything."

"No, he wasn't," Mother replied. "He was very courageous."

"And then," Misha continued, "I think he never thought about himself, his own well-being, and that he placed the interests of the Revolution above everything."

Mother did not reply. Misha knew that to think of Father always made her sad and he did not ask her any more questions. Then Mother, closed her book, turned off the light, and went to bed; but Misha lay a long time with his eyes open, looking at the moonlight slipping into the room.

His talk with Mother had disturbed him. Perhaps it was only now when they were speaking about aims in life, that he was distinctly feeling for the first time that his childhood had ended and that he was now on the highroad of life.

In thinking of his future he did not wish for any other life than the one lived by his father and people like his father, who had given their lives to the great cause of the Revolution....

## **Chapter 71**

### **GENKA'S BLUNDER**

On the morning after the trip to Pushkino Misha told Comrade Sviridov that he had seen Nikitsky, and Sviridov ordered the boys to wait and not to go to Pushkino again.

Meanwhile our friends were occupied with other affairs. The detachment council had decided to recommend a group of Young Pioneers for the Komsomol, and the group included Misha, Genka, Slava, Shura Ogureyev, and Zina Kruglova. Their own Komsomol cell had already accepted them and they were now preparing to appear before the reception commission of the Komsomol District Committee.

Misha was very worried. He could not believe that he would soon be a Komsomol member. Was it possible that his cherished dream was coming



true? He looked with secret & envy at the Komsomol members filling the corridors and rooms at the district committee. What cheerful, confident youngsters they were! It would be interesting to know what they had experienced when they had faced the reception commission? Most probably they, too, had worried. But for them all that was a thing of the past, while he, Misha, was standing in front of a big door covered with posters, timidly waiting for his turn. The commission was deliberating behind this door and there his fate would soon be decided.

Genka was called first.

"Well what?" his friends surrounded him when he came out of the room.

"Everything in order. I answered all the questions."

He told them the questions he had been asked and the answers he had given. One of the questions was: what is the probationary period for school children?

"I said six months," Genka said.

"That's the wrong answer," Misha objected. "A year."

"No, six months," Genka insisted. "That's what I told them and the chairman said it was right."

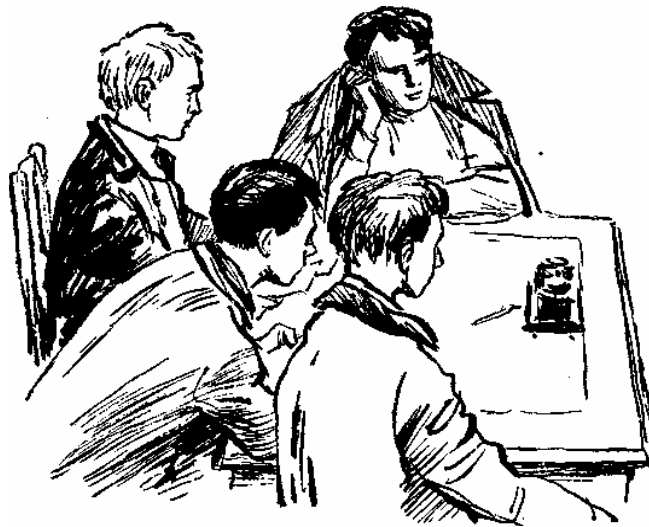
"But how could that be?" Misha was perplexed, "I read the Rules myself."

Misha's turn came. He went into the big room. The commission was in conference at one of the tables, at the end of which sat Nikolai Sevostyanov. Misha sat down shyly, nervously waiting for the questions.

The chairman, a fair-haired young man in a Russian shirt and leather jacket, hurriedly read Misha's application form, putting in "I see," after every word. "Polyakov—I see, Mikhail Grigoryevich—I see, pupil—I see."

"One of our active members," Nikolai Sevostyanov smiled, "group leader and member of the school council."

"Don't praise your own people," the chairman cut him short, "we'll do our own examining."



Misha replied to all the questions. The last was about the probationary

period. Misha knew it was a year, but Genka. . .

"Six months," he said indecisively.

"Wrong," the chairman said. "A year. You may go."



After they had all been called before the commission the boys hurried to keep their appointment with Sviridov. He said he would expect them at ten o'clock. On the way Misha and Slava upbraided Genka. Slava, too, had given the wrong answer.

"We'll have to begin all over again," Misha was saying. "They'll accept everyone except us. We'll be a disgrace to the whole school!"

"But *he* is a howling success at the skating rink!" Slava smirked. "Wastes whole days there, doesn't even read the papers-"

Crushed by all that had happened, Genka did not reply, but breathed fiercely on the heavily frosted window of the tram-car. However, his silence did not help. His friends continued upbraiding him and the thing that hurt most was that they spoke of him in the third person, without even addressing him.

"Everything in order," Misha teased him. "You can't beat us fellows! We know how to look after ourselves, we can do everything."

"And we're the boys for an easy victory," Slava added.

"He dreams of treasure all the time," Misha said unappeased, "treasure, treasure. Just look at the treasure-hunter!" "He wants to be a millionaire," Slava added in a kinder tone. He was evidently beginning to feel sorry for his crestfallen friend.

They arrived at a tall building. On the ground floor they were given passes to Comrade Sviridov in room No. 203.

"Is this how you keep an appointment, my friends?" Sviridov asked sternly when the boys entered his office.

"We were held up at the Komsomol District Committee. The reception commission, you know," Misha replied.

"Is that so?" Sviridov raised his eyebrows. "Then may I offer my congratulations."

The boys sighed dejectedly.

"What's the matter?" Sviridov asked, looking closely at them. "Anything wrong?"

"We flopped," Misha said, averting his eyes.

"Flopped?" Sviridov said in astonishment. "On what?"

"On the question about probation."

"It was my fault," Genka said glumly.

"Did you give the right answers to the other questions?"

"We think so."

"Keep your chins up!" Sviridov laughed. "They won't reject you for one wrong answer. Who wants to be and is worthy of being a Komsomol member will surely be one. Take my advice and don't worry. And now boys, let's get down to our business. Listen carefully. Nikitsky insists his name is Sergei Ivanovich Nikolsky. Moreover, he's named some witnesses, including Filin," Sviridov smiled, "although they all quarrelled after they lost the sheath. Filin's blaming the stamp dealer and the stamp dealer's blaming Filin. By the way," he scrutinized the boys, "they moved those boxes from the cellars in time— someone had obviously frightened them."

The friends flushed and stared at the floor.

"Yes," Sviridov repeated with a hardly perceptible smile, "someone frightened them. However, they did not succeed in hiding them far." He looked again at the boys and burst out laughing. "I know what's bothering you. You want to know what that storehouse contained. I'll satisfy your curiosity later, but in the meantime I've arranged to confront each of you with Nikitsky. You must say all you know. Reply truthfully to all questions. Don't make anything up. Now go to the next room and wait. I'll have you called when you're wanted. And another thing," Sviridov drew the dirk out of a drawer and gave it to Misha, "when I ask why Nikitsky murdered Terentyev, you, Polyakov, show the dirk."

## Chapter 73

### FACE TO FACE WITH NIKITSKY

Slava was called first, then Genka, and finally Misha. When Misha came into the room, in addition to Sviridov, there was a middle-aged man in a naval uniform sitting at the table, a pipe in his mouth. Genka and Slava were sitting gravely near the wall, their caps on their knees.

A sentry with a rifle in his hand stood by the door. Nikitsky sat on a chair in the middle of the room, facing Sviridov. He wore an officer's jacket, blue riding breeches, and top boots and had adopted a careless pose, one leg crossed over the other. His dark hair was combed back neatly.

Sparkling dots of sunlight flashed about the room.

It was only then that Misha noticed a hardly visible scar on Nikitsky's cheek.

As Misha entered, Nikitsky shot a keen, rapid glance at him. But this was neither Revsk nor the plate-layer's hut. Misha looked steadily back at Nikitsky, and as he looked he recalled Polevoy, knocked about and covered with blood, the wrecked railway line, the green field with the riderless horses galloping frenziedly up and down.

"Do you know this man?" Sviridov asked, pointing to Nikitsky.

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"Valeri Sigizmundovich Nikitsky," Misha replied firmly, facing Nikitsky.

Nikitsky did not move.

"Tell me in detail how you came to know him," Sviridov said.

Misha described the raid on Revsk, the attack on the troop train, Filin's store-room.

"What have you to say to this, citizen Nikitsky?" Sviridov asked.

"I've already told you," Nikitsky replied calmly, "that you have more serious testimony than the inventions of this child."

"Do you insist on alleging that you are Sergei Ivanovich Nikolsky?"

"Yes."

"And that you lived in the home of Maria Gavrilovna Terentyeva on the grounds that she knew you served under her son, Vladimir Vladimirovich Terentyev?"

"Yes. She can confirm this."

"Do you continue to allege that Vladimir Vladimirovich Terentyev was killed in the explosion that sank the *Empress Maria*?"

"Yes. Everyone knows that. I tried to save him. I, myself, was picked up by a launch."

"So you tried to save him?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now you, Polyakov, tell me," Sviridov spoke very slowly and watched Nikitsky intently. "Do you know who shot Terentyev?"

"He did," Misha replied firmly and pointed to Nikitsky. Nikitsky continued to sit motionless. "Polevoy told me, and he saw everything himself."

"What have you to say to this?" Sviridov asked Nikitsky.

Nikitsky smiled lamely.

"I've never heard anything more absurd. After all that, would I be living in the home of his mother? If you like to believe such nonsense, then that's your affair."

"Polyakov, can you produce any proofs?"

Misha took the dirk out of his pocket and placed it in front of Sviridov. Nikitsky glued his eyes to the dirk.

Sviridov pulled the blade out of the sheath, drew out the handle and extracted the metal scroll. He then slowly put the dirk together again. Nikitsky followed the movement of his hands.

"Well, citizen Nikitsky, are you familiar with this object?"

Nikitsky leaned back heavily in his chair.

"I've never seen it before."

"Being stubborn won't help you," Sviridov said calmly and placed the dirk under some papers. "Let us proceed. Bring in the witness Maria Gavrilovna Terentyeva," he ordered the sentry.

A tall old woman came slowly in. She was wearing a black coat, and strands of grey hair escaped from under her black shawl.

"Will you please take a seat." Sviridov indicated a chair.

She sat down and closed her eyes wearily.

"Citizeness Terentyeva, will you please tell me the name of this man," Sviridov said.

"Sergei Ivanovich Nikolsky," Terentyeva replied quietly without raising her eyes.

"Where, when, and under what circumstances did you come to know him?"

"He brought a letter from my son during the war."

"What was your son's name?"

"Vladimir."

"Where is he?"

"He was killed."

"When?"

"October 7, 1916, when the *Empress Maria* blew up."

"Are you sure he was killed in the explosion?"

"Of course," she raised her eyes and looked at Sviridov in consternation, "of course. I was officially notified."

"Were you sent his things?"

"No. How could they be sent? Who could have saved them?"

"That means all your son's belongings were lost?"

"I think so."

"Will you please come up to the table."

Terentyeva rose heavily and slowly approached the table.

Sviridov drew the dirk from under the papers and held it out to the woman.

"Do you recognize this dirk?" he asked sharply.

"Yes," Terentyeva said, examining the dirk. "Yes." She looked at Nikitsky in dismay, but he made no movement. "Yes, it's our... it's his dirk. It's Vladimir's."

"Aren't you surprised that all your son's belongings were lost, yet this dirk was saved?"

Terentyeva did not reply. Her fingers trembled on the edge of the table.

"You have nothing to say," Sviridov said. "Then tell me, and I'm asking you for the last time, who is this man?" he pointed at Nikitsky.

"Nikolsky," she said, her voice hardly audible.

Sviridov rose.

"All right," he announced, "I have to tell you, then, that this man," Sviridov raised his arm in Nikitsky's direction and Terentyeva followed it with a perplexed look, "that this man is the murderer of your son!"

Terentyeva swayed and her trembling fingers clutched at the edge of the table.

"What?" she whispered in a choked voice, "what did you say?"

Without looking at her Sviridov said in a dry, official tone:

"On October 7, 1916, Lieutenant Nikitsky shot and killed Captain of the Second Rank Vladimir Vladimirovich Terentyev. The murder was committed with intent to steal this dirk."

The room became quite still. The sentry shifted his weight from one foot to the other and his rifle butt hit the carpet faintly. Nikitsky sat without moving, his eyes fixed on the toe of his boot. Terentyeva stood motionless looking at Nikitsky, and her long, dry fingers gripped the edge of the table.

"Valeri—Valeri," she kept repeating feebly. Then she reeled and began to fall.

Sviridov and the man in the naval uniform sprang to her assistance.

## Chapter 73

### THE TERYTYEV FAMILY

A big car sped along the Yaroslav Highway. In it sat Sviridov, the sailor, Terentyeva, and our friends.

The small houses of the Moscow suburbs flashed by; soon these gave way to pine woods, fields covered with grey, melting snow, and numerous villages.

"This dirk," Maria Gavrilovna was saying, "once belonged to Polikarp Terentyev, a famous gunsmith who lived one hundred and fifty years ago. It is said that he got it during one of his Eastern campaigns."

Misha nudged his friends and significantly raised a finger.

"During the reign of Empress Elizaveta Petrovna," Maria Gavrilovna continued, "Polikarp Terentyev drove out to his estate and built a secret hiding place in his house. Apparently the circumstances of those disturbing times made this necessary. The house still contains some of the things he made: a casket with a secret, special pulleys, a hoist, even a clock of his own design. His greatest hobby was deep-sea diving. But all his designs for diving apparatus and plans to salvage some sunken vessel or other were, of course, fantastic for his time. All the same, diving and salvaging became a tradition in our family. Polikarp Terentyev's work was continued by his son and grandson, and by my son Vladimir. The family was always fitting out expeditions to distant countries. Vladimir's grandfather even spent some years in Ceylon trying to salvage a vessel. And Vladimir's father collected data about the *Prince*. But all this work was enveloped in mystery."

"Interesting!" Sviridov said.

"A feature of the secret hiding place," Maria Gavrilovna went on, "was that it was known only to one person in the house—the head of the family. The code indicating the whereabouts of the secret was put into the dirk by the old man. My son was the last of the Terentyevs. His father gave him the dirk in December 1915 and Vladimir came to Pushkino specially to get it. It

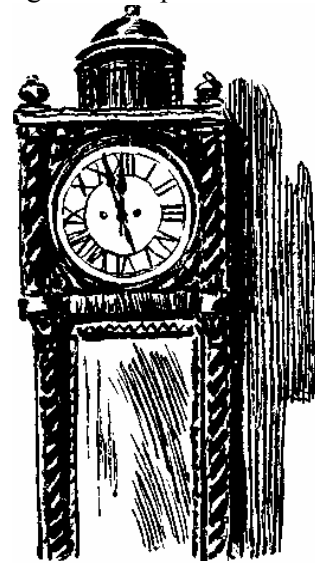
was then that he quarrelled with his wife, Ksenia. She wanted him to leave the dirk with her and show her the secret hiding place. Ksenia's brother, Valeri Nikitsky, played a big role in that quarrel. Possibly he thought that the hiding place contained valuables. He was mistaken, of course. If that had been the case, Vladimir would have undoubtedly left the dirk in my keeping before he left."

Misha and Slava gave Genka a mocking look.

"Last year," Maria Gavrilovna continued, "Valeri came to me and assured me that the hiding place contained some documents compromising Vladimir. He said that Vladimir had died in his arms and that before he died he had asked him to destroy these documents and save his honour. Valeri assured me that this was why he remained in Russia and was forced to go into hiding."

The car turned into Pushkino and stopped in front of Terentyeva's house.

It was an old brick house with columns in front of it. The numerous out-houses in the grounds were neglected and partly in ruins, but the house itself was preserved. The smooth snow near the right wing of the house and the frost-covered windows showed that only the left wing was occupied.



They went into the dining-room in the middle of which stood a long table with round legs. One corner of the table-cloth was turned up, and on the oilcloth were three small mounds of buckwheat: someone had evidently been sorting it.

"We have many clocks in the house," Maria Gavrilovna said, "and I don't know which one is indicated."

"Most likely the one you spoke about," Sviridov remarked.

"That one is in the library."

A big clock in a wooden casing stood in an alcove in the library. Its face was yellow behind the glass. Near the opening for the winding key there was a hardly perceptible slit. Sviridov opened the clock face. The pendulum swayed slantwise and clattered.

Sviridov moved the hands to one minute to twelve, inserted the bronze serpent from the dirk into the slit, and, carefully turning it to the right, wound the clock.

Everyone waited in tense expectation. Genka stood with his mouth wide open.

The minute hand trembled and moved—a little door opened above the face and a cuckoo hopped out. It sang out "cuckoo" twelve times, then the clock whirled, the cuckoo jerked forward, and the whole tower of the clock moved forward leaving the upper part of the clock-case open. The clock-case had double walls. The cunning part about the hiding place was that the clock-case appeared to be made of a solid piece of wood. It was only when the clock was wound up by the serpent that the tower rose and revealed the hiding place, which consisted of a deep square box filled with papers.

There were blue-prints with frayed edges rolled and tied with thread, folders packed tightly with sheets of paper yellowed with age, note-books and a large morocco-covered writing-pad.

Sviridov and the sailor carefully lifted out the documents, laid them out on the table, and began studying them attentively, exchanging a brief sentence every now and again. The boys pressed close to the table, also trying to see.

"Everything's arranged according to seas and oceans," the sailor said. "There, even the Indian Ocean." On the cover of one folder he read: "*Grosvenor*, an English vessel. Sank in 1782 near Ceylon. Cargo: gold and precious stones. *Betsy*, a brig...."

"Let's take a look at our own seas," Sviridov interrupted.

"All right." The sailor sorted the folders and untied one which had the words *Black Sea* written on it. "Here is the title: *Trapezund*, a vessel belonging to Devlet-Girey, the Khan of the Crimea. The *Prince* sank in November 1854 in the Bay of Balaklava after striking rocks during a storm. Why, here's a whole list!" He turned over the papers, shaking his head. "This is very valuable! Precise co-ordinates of the location of sunken vessels, testimony of witnesses. A whole reference book, no less...."

"Yes, it's wonderful," Sviridov said. "All this will be useful for our new salvage organization."

"Yes," the sailor nodded, "very useful indeed."

## Chapter 74

### NEW MEMBERS OF THE KOMSOMOL

Again the car sped along the Yaroslav Highway, this time in the direction of Moscow. Misha, Genka, and Slava were sitting comfortably in the back seat. Sviridov and the sailor had remained behind at Terentyeva's house, but the boys had been sent back as they had to hurry to school for the meeting to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Red Army.



"I love riding in cars," Genka said, as he leaned against the soft back with an air of importance.

"A habit," Misha remarked.

"He was a nasty old man, all the same," Genka began.

"Who?"

"Polikarp Terentyev."

"Why?"

"He was too stingy even to leave some cash in the hiding place."

"So that's it," Misha laughed. "Here, tell us some more about the thread."

"What has thread got to do with it? You think I didn't know even then that the storehouse contained weapons? You can bet your boots I did. Only I told you it was thread on purpose. I wanted to have a secret of my own. Honest! And I realized that Nikitsky was a spy. You just see, in the end he'll confess that he blew up the *Empress Maria*."

"Wasn't it remarkable," Misha said. "Nikitsky was still hiding in Pushkino, yet Sviridov already knew everything, so they'd have caught him at the frontier anyway."

"Misha, what about the letter?" Slava asked.

"Oh, yes!" Misha said remembering suddenly.

He took a letter out of his pocket. Sviridov had handed it to him with a mysterious air. On the envelope someone had written neatly: *To Mikhail Polyakov and Gennady Petrov. Personal.*

"See that?" Genka mocked Slava. "You're not even mentioned here."

"Don't rush on," Misha stopped him, "we must read it first."

He opened the letter and read aloud:

Hello, dear Misha and Genka,

Guess who this letter is from. Guessed? Well, of course, you guessed. That's right! It's me, Sergei Ivanovich Polevoy. Well, how are you getting along, Mikhail Grigoryevich? All right? Eh?

Comrade Sviridov wrote to me about your affairs. Good for you! I never thought you would succeed in bringing down Nikitsky! It made me feel a little ashamed of the bit of cudgelling he gave me back in Revsk.

You can have the dirk as a keepsake from me. I hear you have a third friend, so I'm giving it to the three of you. When you grow up and meet together, you'll look at it and recall the days of your youth!

About myself I can tell you that I'm again serving in the fleet. Only I'm on a new job now. We're salvaging ships, repairing them, and sending them out to sail the high seas.

This brings my little note to an end.

I would like you to grow up to be real Communists and true sons of our great Revolution.

With communist greetings,

*Polevoy.*

... The car was already in the city and the Sukharyev Tower loomed before

the windscreen.

"We're going to be late for the meeting," Misha said. "Perhaps we shouldn't go at all," Slava suggested. "It's not so interesting to watch other people getting Komsomol membership cards...."

"That's the very reason why we have to be at the meeting," Misha declared, "otherwise we'll be ridiculed."

"Here we are," the chauffeur announced.

The boys scrambled out of the car and entered the school building. The meeting had already started. The staircase was quiet and deserted, only Auntie Brosha was sitting near the cloak-room with her everlasting knitting.

"I'm not supposed to let anyone in," she said, "so that everybody should learn to come on time."

"Oh, Auntie Brosha, dear," Misha pleaded, "for the sake of the anniversary."

"Only for the sake of the anniversary, then," said Auntie Brosha.

She smiled and took their coats.

The boys went upstairs, tiptoed into the crowded hall, and stood just inside the door. Far down the hall they could see the table covered with a red cloth standing on the platform and the members of the presidium sitting behind it. The red streamer across the wall above the wide windows bore the words:

"Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic Revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."

Misha could hardly read the words. The pale round February sun shone through the windows with such a strong light that it hurt his eyes to look at it.

Nikolai Sevostyanov was finishing his speech. He shut his notebook and said:

"Comrades! The solemnity of this occasion is enhanced for us by the fact that to-day, by decision of the Bureau of the Khamovniki District Committee of the Komsomol, the first group of the best Young Pioneers of our detachment have been accepted into the Komsomol."

The faces of the three boys became flushed. Genka and Slava stood with their eyes on the floor, but Misha, though it hurt his eyes to do so, looked fixedly at the sun; it seemed to him that the entire horizon was covered with thousands of tiny shining suns.

"Here are the names," Nikolai continued, and again opened his note-book, "Margarita Voronina, Zina Kruglova, Shura Ogureyev, Slava Eldarov, Misha Polyakov, Genka Petrov...."

What was that? Had they heard right? The friends looked at each other, and Genka, in a burst of delight, slapped Slava on the back. Slava wanted to return the blow, but Alexandra Sergeyevna, sitting near them, raised her finger warningly, and Slava contented himself with just kicking Genka.

Then everyone rose and sang the *Internationale*. Misha sang in ringing tones with an unexpected quaver in his voice.

The shining disc beyond the windows grew brighter and brighter. Its rays

widened out and spread to the entire horizon with its outlines of houses, roofs, belfries, and Kremlin towers.

Misha looked steadily at this disc. And before his eyes there rose the troop train, the Red Army soldiers, Polevoy in his grey army great-coat, and the muscular worker breaking with his sledge hammer the chains fettering the globe.

